History of Oriya Literature

Dr. Mayadhar Mansinha



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NEW DELHI

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HISTORY OF ORIYA LITERATURE

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BY

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SAHITYA AKADEMI

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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

The present volume is the third in the series of Histories of Literature which the Sahitya Akademi has sponsored for publication. The two earlier volumes, namely, *History of Malayalam Literature* by Sri P. K. Parameswaran Nair and *History of Bengali Literature* by Dr. Sukumar Sen were published in Malayalam and English respectively and have been well received by discerning critics. Three more volumes, namely, *History of Assamese Literature* by Dr. B. K. Barua, *History of Kannada Literature* by Prof. R. S. Mugali and *History of Telugu Literature* by Dr. G. V. Sitapati are in press and expected to be published shortly. Other volumes are under preparation.

These volumes have been planned in uniform size and aim at a standard quality. The Sahitya Akademi hopes in course of time to publish their translation in all major Indian languages of the country so as to make available to the reader authentic surveys of Indian literature, not only of his own region but of the other regions as well. For Indian literature is one though written in many languages. Though the contribution of Oriya to the literature of India is not inconsiderable, very little is known of it outside the Oriya-reading public. It is hoped that this volume will help to introduce the wealth of Oriya literature to the Indian reader in general and will prove of as much interest to the general reader as to the scholar.

The selection of authors of these Histories is made by the Sahitya Akademi in consultation with its Advisory Board in the language concerned and the manuscripts are read and approved by a committee of its literary advisers before they are published. No History of Literature, unless it is a mere chronological catalogue of names, can wholly avoid critical estimates and qualitative preferences. These critical estimates are necessarily the author's and it is not unlikely that there will be difference of opinion amongst the readers in this matter. The publisher (in this case the Sahitya Akademi) need not be identified with these estimates.

SAHITYA AKADEMI

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CHAPTER I

PATTERNS OF LIFE IN ORISSA, AS BACKGROUND TO ITS LITERATURE

A Synthetic Culture

Hemmed in on one side by the sea, on all other sides by ranges of mountains and dense forests, and intersected by innumerable rivers, Orissa, because of her geographical position, has developed a pattern of life, art and literature all of her own. Her gods, goddesses and temples, her religious and social structure, her dance and music have all developed fascinating individual variants of their own which mark them out as distinct entities in similar categories in India. Lying between North and South India across a natural highway along the eastern coast of India, Orissa also displays in and through her native individuality an interesting synthesis of both Dravidian and Aryan cultures, with delightful assimilations from the life of the tribals, who form not only a considerable portion of her population, but also an integral part of the economic and social life of the State. It may be a unique feature of Oriya literature that it is in this, of all Indian literatures, that the picturesque Adivasi not only comes in as a character in poetry and puranas from the earliest times, but has also played a glorious role as literary creator. We shall meet this pleasant feature in Oriya literature again and again in the following pages. And though the Oriyas speak a language of the Indo-Germanic group, i.e. Oriya, nearly three-fourths of their entire social life, under the thin veneer of Aryanisation, is definitely Dravidian. Many of the commonest words of daily use in an Oriya household are of Dravidian origin and the general culture and habiliments are more attuned to and have closer affinities with Southern patterns than with the Northern.

The Holy Land of India

Orissa, the home-state of Lord Jagannatha, is the holy land of India. Roads of pilgrimage, carrying millions of devotees

every year, have converged towards her from all parts of India, since the days of the *Mahabharata*. For peoples of every denomination of the Hindu faith there is a holy shrine of all-India renown on Orissa's soil. From the river Vaitarani in the north, to the Chilka lake in the south, every inch of land in central Orissa is supposed to be holy according to Hindu scriptures.

The national life and culture of Orissa thus form a highly interesting amalgam, evolved out of Dravido-Aryan-Austric elements, and not as much affected by the external influences of Islam and Christianity as other parts of India. The symbol of this purely indigenous Indian cultural synthesis is the shrine of Jagannatha. Originally a god of the tribal Savaras, and adopted later successively by the Aryan faiths of Jainism, Buddhism, Tantricism and Vaishnavism, Jagannatha bears the indelible impress of each of these cults even today. The traditions and practices which centre in and around this famous temple are also still South Indian or Dravidian to a large extent.

Standing on Orissa's soil, the influence of this god, the most popular god of the Hindu pantheon, has penetrated deep into the literature of Orissa. Down to the beginning of modern times almost every Oriya poet began or finished his work with prayers to this divinity. The gradual evolution of this national Deity and the reflection of that evolutionary process in the literature of Orissa will be discussed later on at appropriate places.

Art and Architecture

Out of Orissa's holiness has also sprung her magnificent artistic heritage. The Oriyas displayed remarkable architectural creative power during a long period of history. For a little over a millenium, from the first century B.C., when Emperor Kharavela carved caves in the twin hills of Udayagiri and Khandagiri near Bhubaneswara, for his own and his queen's pious old age, till the 13th century A.D., when king Narasimha Deva I built the magnificent Sun-temple at Konarak, the Oriyas seem to have indulged a national passion for building on a vast scale. They built bridges and embankments that have remained intact for centuries, displaying extraordinary

engineering skill.[1] They also ornamented the whole land with innumerable temples of all types. They evolved their peculiarly graceful and elegant native styles of temple architecture, the purest Indo-Aryan form according to connoisseurs.[2] And while they built temples like giants, they sculptured the walls of those temples like master-artists.[3] But while to thousands of tourists from all over the world, the temples of Bhubaneswara and Konarak unveil what is, perhaps, a strange medieval world of sheer beauty, youth and existence, only the Oriyas know how deeply and significantly these mute stone structures have influenced their culture and literature.

Orissa's dance, drama and music, too, have originated from these temples. They practically epitomise the social and cultural life of the Oriyas, including even their style of cooking. In medieval times Oriya poets wrote their ornamental Kavyas with the pattern of Orissan temples in mind. To them each Kavya was like a temple, architecturally solid, covered thickly with sculpture from start to finish.

A Harmonious Whole

The ancient Oriyas appear to have evolved a harmonious pattern of life of their own. In an Odissi dance performed to the

[1] Says a British Administrator regarding the extraordinary engineering skill of the Orissan builders: 'The number and magnificence of the remains at Bhubaneswar and elsewhere are evidence of a wealthy and highly civilised kingdom. The art of architecture and sculpture must have been well developed to enable such huge structures to be designed and constructed, and the skill and the resource both of builders and masons are clearly shown by the fact that they were able to move and lay in place, without mortar, such gigantic stone blocks and to produce the vigorous and often exquisitely carved figures, foliage and arabesque patterns, which add charm to the carvings adorning these shrines.'—L.S.S. O' Malley, I.C.S., in the *District Gazetteer of Puri*, p. 28

[2] In respect of these temples Monmohan Ganguly observes at the very begining of his *Orissa and Her Remains* : 'I need not make an apology to my readers for taking up Orissa in preference to other provinces comprising India. It is a patent fact that it has a peculiar interest of its own, alike from an archaeological and architectural point of view, not shared in common by other Indian provinces. To a student of architecture, it is important by reason of its being the seat of Indo-Aryan style in its purest form; here we do not notice the least vestige of foreign influence. It has maintained its native purity marvellously, being nurtured and reared on the very soil where it grew, without any extraneous aid. This is really a marvel in the History of Architecture, the like of which we very rarely come across. That the Orissan sub-group of Indo-Aryan style of Architecture presents a continuous series for a period of 5 to 6 centuries lends an additional weight to its study and renders it very interesting.'

[3] Thus observes E. B. Havell on the horse and charioteer of Konarak: 'Had it by chance been labelled Roman or Greek, this magnificent work of Art would now be the pride of some great metropolitan museum in Europe and America...

accompaniment of medieval Oriya songs or in a canto from a Kavya by Upendra Bhanja recited under the shadow of the temple walls of Konarak or Lingaraja, any connoisseur or student of sociology may easily discern a deep, almost consanguinous relationship. In them all, the temple-sculpture, the medieval Oriya poetry, the Odissi dance, and Oriya music, the peculiar indigenous element distinctly different from either the Southern or the Northern varieties, can easily be perceived. The jewellery on the beautiful sculptured women of the Konarak and Bhubaneswara temples, is still worn by the unsophisticated in the rural areas of Orissa and the men and women of the district of Sambalpur and the areas round about, not completely spoiled by civilisation as yet, with their healthy figures and picturesque clothes, appear to have come right off the walls of these temples. The recitation of the ancient Oriya puranas and kavyas in the village surroundings by these people so completely fits in with the general setting, as to give the happy impression of a natural birth of the entire socio-artistic pattern of Orissa, right out of its own soil, following its own laws of growth and fulfilment.

Socio-cultural Life

Orissa has not a single big city worth the name. Even Cuttack and Bhubaneswara, the capital towns, are only partly urban. Orissa is still predominantly agricultural, consisting of about 50,000 villages, big and small. The Oriyas live in villages that are interestingly different in pattern from those in the neighbouring states. These are, generally, two rows of thatched houses standing shoulder to shoulder, with a street running in between, and with a temple and a tank at one end and a *Bhagavataghara* or a village hall at the other. The village homes are invariably decorated with mural paintings of some sort, and have a shady garden at the back. The *Bhagavata* of Jagannatha Dasa and the village priest still wield considerable influence on the social and individual life of the average Oriya

Here the Indian sculptors have shown that they can express with as much fire and passion as the greatest European artists, the pride and glory of triumphant warfare; for not even the Homeric grandeur of the Elgin marbles surpasses the magnificent movement and modelling of this Indian Achilles, and the superbly monumental war-horse in its massive strength and vigour is not unworthy of comparison with Verocchio's famous masterpeice at Venice.'—*Indian Sculpture and Painting* (1928), pp. 147-8

in the villages. While the *Bhagavata* of Jagannatha Dasa is recited daily, either in the common *Bhagavataghara* or in families, time is reserved during the whole month of Kartika (October-November) after the cessation of the monsoons, when the expectation of the harvest soon to be brought home is cheering, generally for the complete recitation of one whole Oriya purana, a new one each year. The month of Chaitra, after the harvest is in, is given to festivals of gods and goddesses, *melas,* dances, *palas,* and *yatras,* in all of which poetry, songs and dramas play a predominant part in the entertainment of the people. Almost every village in Orissa has a study-group, where, during leisure hours, poems are recited, songs sung, and puranas discussed. The excellent companion organisation, the *akhada* or the village gymnasium, also still survives in many parts, though generally in a moribund condition at present. In olden days, every village had a library of palmleaf manuscripts in the *Bhagavataghara* and almost every important family had a small library of its own. That keen spontaneous desire of the people to have the pride and joy of possessing learning and literature seems to have been killed forever through an imposed system of education under the British and by the capitalist-run Press. With the simple villagers, however, the sanctity of the palm-leaf and the ancient iron stylus still remain quite effective. A printed book, or even paper for that matter, is still not acceptable in ceremonial matters.

Orissa, Utkala and Kalinga

The anglicised word 'Oriya' is derived from Odia, which again is a modern version of the word Odra, or Udra, which was an ancient tribe. This tribe still survives as Odos, the vast cultivating class in the central belt of present Orissa. What is Orissa now was also known in ancient times as Kalinga and Utkala. Most certainly the Kalingas and the Utkalas were also tribes like the Odras or Udras. But due to terrible struggles either for existence or for supremacy or maybe due to a process of gradual absorption and assimilation, the Kalingas and the Utkalas appear to have gone silently out of history, the latter by the 14th and the former by the 7th century A.D., leaving the entire land in the possession of the Odras, the present eponymous community of this historic state. As the land of the

Odras, this state has been known as simply Odra-Desa or Odissa (anglicised as Orissa) for the last six or seven centuries. But the present day Oriyas (Odias in vernacular) have a nostalgic preference for the ancient names of Kalinga and Utkala. Hence Orissa's only university at present is called the Utkala University and it is not known to many outside Orissa that the Kalinga prize awarded every year by UNESCO for the popularisation of science, the Kalinga Airways and other Kalinga industries have all been organised by a patriotic Oriya industrialist, Sri Vijayananda Patnaik.

Military Traditions in Oriya Literature

That these Oriyas, or the ancient Kalingas, were once a prosperous people with quite creditable traditions as conquerors and empire-builders, the pages of history provide ample evidence. The Kalinga war of Asoka has become world famous, not because of an Imperial army's conquest, but because of the stubborn resistance of a small freedom-loving people to the organised might of a vast empire. 'The numbers of Kalingans who were captured, killed, or died of privations indicate the stubborn resistance of the nation to the aggression of the Northern Empire. In that little strip of country (Kalinga) extending along the Eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal, many a great battle must have been fought from the banks of the Subarnarekha to that of Krishna.'[1] The military tradition displayed in resisting the army of the Maurya Empire was maintained for about twenty centuries in Orissa. No wonder, therefore, that the Kalingans have been singled out as examples of bravery in the *Sahitya Darpana*, the famous book of Sanskrit poetics. For three centuries after the whole of Northern and Western India, including neighbouring Bengal, had been conquered and ruled by the Mussalmans, Orissa remained not only gloriously independent, but a common terror to Moslem rulers both in the North and South of India. It not only repulsed repeated Moslem invasions but carried death and defeat into the hearts of Moslem kingdoms. About Kapilendra Deva's (1435-1466) campaigns into the Bahmani Sultanate, R. D. Banerjee says, '. . . both Ferista and Burhan-i-Ma'asil agree in stating that the king of Orissa

[1] R. D. Banerjee, *History of Orissa*, Vol. I, p. 63

invaded the Bahmani empire and almost reached the gates of Bidar. . . . Perhaps this is the only instance in which the Indian Mussalman historian was compelled to admit the defeat of a king of his own community.'[1] Hunter also says in his *Orissa* (p. 5): 'Three centuries of raids, and hollow treaties, and mutual wrong elapsed (1200-1500 A.D.) before anything like the subjugation of Orissa by the Mussalmans took place. Long before the Afgans had trodden the conspicuous Hindu dynasties of India into the dust, Orissa asserted its independence and remained the stronghold of the ancient national faith. It was not till its princes had proved false to their trust and leagued themselves with the Mussalmans against the patriot cause, that they fell.'

Patriotism is *not* an absolutely new concept in India as many try to make out. In the 14th-15th century, in the pages of the Oriya *Mahabharata* by the peasant-poet Sarala Dasa, we come across throbbing pride in the mother state. We shall see later on also how this poet has utilised the military exploits of his contemporary, the Oriya King Kapilendra Deva, referred to above, for describing the campaigns of the Pandavas. The *Samara Taranga* (Waves of War) by Brajanatha Badajena of 17th-18th century and the military ballads and books on warfare written in verse, recently brought to light, show how the military traditons of the Oriyas have left their impress on their literature.

Asoka's Edicts and Oriya Literature

There are two edicts of Asoka, specifically calling for a just and benign administration of Kalinga, the newly conquered land, within the boundaries of the present Orissa State, proving without any doubt that the Kalinga of Asoka's day was no other than the present State of Orissa. But Asoka's conquest of Kalinga has direct bearing on the history of the literature of Orissa as well. The Imperial edicts of Asoka now happen to be the oldest extant literary records in Orissa, giving evidence of the language spoken or understood by the people in Orissa two thousand years ago. As the earliest literary expression in Orissa we shall refer to them again, with details, in the chapter on the development of the Oriya language.

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 297

The Sea in Oriya Literature

The Kalingas and the Utkalas, the supposed forbears of the present day Oriyas, once enjoyed an extensive maritime trade with South-Eastern Asia and had colonial settlements in Southern Burma and the Indonesian islands. The celebrated Sailendra dynasty, the immortal builders of Borobuddur in Java, is said to have been an offshoot of the Sailodbhavas, the ruling family of the once flourishing principality of Kongoda in Central Orissa.[1] This family probably came to grief under pincer assaults from the Gangas in the South and the Bhaumas in the North. They appear to have thus left the mother country for good about the 7th century A.D., and to have settled and ruled in colonies of Kongodites in South-east Asia, already long established there. Neither the Kongoda kingdom nor the Sailodbhavas are heard of in Orissan history after the 7th century A.D. We do hear of the Sailendras across the seas in South-east Asia by about the same time, and this strongly endorses the evidence for a royal migration from Kongoda to the Indonesian lands. We shall see later on that maritime enterprises play quite an interesting part in Oriya folk-tales and poetry.

The Decline and the Revival

The Oriyas lost their extensive maritime trade by about the 16th century, due to the silting up of the Orissa rivers. Round about the same time they also lost their political independence, which gradually led to the partition of the land into four parts, each tacked to a different neighbouring State. The Oriyas have been living under these twin misfortunes for the last four hundred years. This long dark political night of the Oriyas seems to have ended at last with the formation of the separate State of Orissa in 1936. They were thus enabled to live under

[1] 'I do not think there is any need for me to stress how similar they are in this respect as well as in general style and manner of execution to those of the world famous Buddhist temple at Borobuddur in Java. The resemblance is not of course coincidental, but is due to the direct implantation in Indonesia of the Mahayana Buddhist, Saivite and Vaishnavite culture of Orissa or that part of it called Kalinga by the Sailendra emperors who ruled Java from 8th to 14th centuries. They are convincingly identified as a descendant branch of the Sailodbhava kings who preceded the Bhaumas in Kalinga. The fact that both the Sisireswar and Borobuddur can be dated as the 8th century makes their stylistic connection ever more certain.'—William Willetts in *Illustrated Weekly of India*, July 12, 1959

one administration again. With her rich and immense, but as yet untapped natural resources, Orissa began to develop gigantic hydro-electric projects like those of Hirakud and Machhkunda, the steel plant at Rourkela and the seaport at Paradwipa, which have been started as parts of a vast national plan. Orissa's political as well as her economic prosperity is thus being restored.

CHAPTER II

GENERAL CHARACTER OF ORIYA LITERATURE

Essentially Proletarian

The most outstanding characteristic of the Oriya literature, when one surveys its entire panorama, appears to be the very gratifying fact that essentially it is a literature of the common people. In all other modern Indian languages literatures were ushered into existence by persons who were seasoned scholars in Sanskrit, India's great sacrosanct classical tongue. But poor Oriya cannot boast of either royal patronage or a scholastic foundation. Oriya literature was born and has developed and thrived because of the unseen but powerful urge of an isolated and neglected people who earnestly wished to see their own humble and homely thoughts, dreams, aspirations and experiences given expression to in the speech of their day-to-day life. No Maharaja ever helped her poets on the scale or with the enthusiasm that was the case with other Indian languages. Except during the medieval period, and occasionally in the modern, no great work of this literature has ever been dedicated to any crowned head. Poets in Orissa, not only in the initial pioneering stages, but all through her history, have been essentially men and women of the proletariat, ignorant not only of Sanskrit but even of any other language except their own. Oriya literature, more than any other Indian literature, is really democratic, created by the people and for the people. It has grown and still thrives not because of the encouragement of the rulers of the land, but in spite not only of their apathy and indifference, but of their positive contempt and even organised suppression during some periods. No other Indian language has had to struggle so hard for its very existence, nor has suffered such losses through the linguistic aggressiveness of neighbours.

True to the synthetic genius of the people of Orissa, Oriya literature is not only proletarian but has developed, in spite of contempt, disregard and violence from many quarters, an amazingly consmopolitan character. It has been enriched by

the natives of the soil and also by Telugus, Marathas, Bengalees, Rohilkhandis, Mussalmans and aborigines. This may be the only literature in the Indo-Aryan family of North Indian languages to which the Adivasi has contributed so significantly, as already said in the previous chapter. The blind Khond poet Bhima Bhoi's monotheistic *bhajanas* are priceless treasures of this language. The Adivasi figures in the poetry of Orissa almost from the very beginning. Bhima, a fisherman, has left behind a ballad that any erudite Sanskrit scholar would be proud of and which is, even now, lovingly recited in almost every village in Orissa. Yadumoni, the carpenter, has become legendary in the land as a wit as well as a top-ranking rhetorical poet. Innumerable also are the most valued contributions to this literature from Orissa's genuine peasantry, the historic Odras.

And it is an additional proof of the proletarian character of this literature that, as we proceed from period to period, we find it deeply coloured by the changing religious faiths of the people under successive historic dynasties. First it is Jainism, then Buddhism, then Siva-Saktism and the last to appear in the field and the most deeply enduring of all, leaving the profoundest impression on the mind and character of the people, is Vaishnavism with its two branches, the Rama-cult and the Krishna-cult. The basic faith of the Oriya people appears to be, however, what may be called Mahayana-Vaishnavism, which, in varied forms, has, from earliest times, been reflected not only in the literature but also in their art and architecture and their national character.

The Palm-leaf Libraries in the Villages

Before the advent of the printing press in the last century, the entire literature was lying on palm leaves, inscribed with an iron stylus by the patient and pious labour of devoted scribes, a labour extending over months and years. I remember an honest hardworking peasant of my village in my childhood days, who for years spent all his middays in silent, painstaking labour, transcribing only one book, the *Bhagabata* of Jagannatha Dasa, the guiding star of his whole religious life. At that time printed sets of Jagannatha's *Bhagabata* were already available in the market, and, I suppose, had already made their appearance

in the village. But to that innocent peasant the printed paper was still vulgar, lacking the aroma of sanctity attached to palm leaves.

Libraries of palm-leaf manuscripts are even now found in almost every village of Orissa. Every important family in a village possesses a private library of these ancient books as a proud family heirloom. Not even the fringe of this vast imprisoned literature has yet been touched by research workers. The village folk guard these books as precious, occult knowledge with fanatical zeal and pathetic ignorance.

The existence of this extensive palm-leaf library system in Orissa for so many centuries, covering almost every village and almost every important family in the land, and mostly created and maintained by the peasantry, is another proof of the basically proletarian character of Oriya literature.

Extensive

As Indian languages go, Oriya literature is quite extensive. There are in Oriya at least thirty well-known versions of the *Ramayana* and four or five recognised versions of the *Mahabharata*. Practically all the puranas are there, most of them related to the Sanskrit originals only in name, because of the free display of imagination by the Oriya authors. Rhetorical poetry of the medieval period is equally abundant. While puranas live on in the mass mind because of their excellent story elements, the rhetorical poetry of the medieval period is still the delight and passion of the people because of the beauty of the language, the varied associations of sense with sound, and the romantic tales it generally deals with. This entire old literature remains a world in itself, peculiarly satisfying to the psychology of the peasantry, comfortably meeting them on their own level, fulfilling their mythological, religious, moral, and above all, their aesthetic demands. Modern literature so-called has deplorably failed to reach the people in the way the old did and still does. There are definitely no greater genuine 'people's poets' than the great ancients of the Oriya literature. In spite of the printing press, the daily paper, the literary periodicals and the schools and colleges, modern literature has failed to reach village homes. The semi-literate village

reciters, the wandering minstrels, the dancers, and open-air theatrical troupes have kept the old literature alive among the masses through all the vicissitudes of the history of the land, and even the printing press has popularised the old literature more than the new. The best-sellers in Oriya are still the puranas, or the *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa, or the lyrical *Ramayana* of Viswanatha Khuntia.

CHAPTER III

THE ORIYA LANGUAGE

Its Character and Stages of Early Development

Like Bengali and Assamese, Oriya too is a member of the eastern or Magadhi group of the Indo-Germanic family of languages in India. Oriya is spoken by about 16 million people who are spread along the north-eastern sea-coast of India. To the north of its territory lies the region of the Bhojpuri tongues and to the south that of Telugu of the Dravidian family of languages. On the west Oriya extends quite a good distance, gradually merging into the dialects of Bhatri, Halvi and Chhatisgadi in Madhya Pradesh. There are still hundreds of thousands of Oriya-speaking people beyond the political borders of the Orissa state, such as those in the Singhbhum district of Bihar. The total area of the Oriya-speaking land may roughly be about 80,000 sq. miles.

As to the peculiarities of Oriya as a language as distinct from its sister languages like Hindi, Bengali and Assamese, the following observations by a foreigner who knew not only all these languages but also Sanskrit, both classical and Vedic, may be of interest to the readers. He says :

'Its [Oriya language's] grammatical construction closely resembles that of Bengali, but it has one great advantage over Bengali in the fact that, as a rule, it is pronounced as it is spelt. There are few of those slurred consonants and broken vowels which make Bengali so difficult to the foreigner and each letter in each word is clearly sounded. The Oriya verbal system is at once simple and complete. It has a long array of tenses, but the whole is so logically arranged, and built on so regular a model, that its principles are particularly noticeable for the very complete set of verbal nouns, present, past and future. When an Oriya wishes to express the idea embodied in what in Latin would be called the Infinitive, he simply takes the appropriate verbal noun and declines it in the case which the meaning requires. As every infinitive must be some oblique case of a verbal noun it follows that Oriya grammar does not

know the so-called infinitive mood at all. In this respect Oriya is in an older stage of grammatical development than even classical Sanskrit and, among Indo-European languages, can only be compared with the ancient Sanskrit as spoken in the Vedic times...

Oriya is remarkably free from dialectic variations. The well-known saying which is true all over the north of India, that the languages change every ten kos does not hold in Orissa. In what is known as the Mughalbundi, which consists of Cuttack, Puri and the southern half of Bȧlasore, the language is one and the same.

Oriya is encumbered with the drawback of an excessively awkward and cumbrous written character. This character is, in its basis, the same as Devanagari, but is written by the local scribes with a stylus on a palm-leaf. These scratches are, in themselves, legible, but in order to make them more plain, ink is rubbed over the surface of the leaf, and fills up the furrows which form the letters. The palm-leaf is extremely fragile, and any scratch in the direction of the grain tends to make it split. As a line of writing on the long, narrow leaf is necessarily in the direction of the grain, this peculiarity prohibits the use of the straight top line or matra which is a distinguishing characteristic of the Devanagari character. The Orissa scribe is compelled to substitute a series of curves, which almost surround each letter.[1]

The Script

The observations of the British scholar on the Oriya script refer really to the source of its peculiar character. Except for horoscopes, nobody in Orissa uses palm-leaf and the iron stylus these days. But it has to be admitted that the script of this language is really cumbrous. A legacy of the palm-leaf, the Oriya script is indeed a nightmare to printers and is definitely a handicap to the spread of Oriya literature, as compared with sister scripts in India and abroad.

But as in her total culture, in her script also Orissa presents an interesting synthesis of the north and south of India. Originating from the Brahmi script in the 3rd century B.C. it has gradually developed towards the present form. This combines the characteristics of the southern Kalinga script with those of the so-called Gupta and Proto-Bengali scripts.

[1] L. S. S. O'Malley in the *District Gazetteer of Puri*, pp 75-76

Discussions on script reforms, however, have been taking place, off and on, in the Orissa press for the last sixty years or so. But an innate conservatism, coupled with a pervasive parochial nationalism, stands against any reform in the existing script or the adoption of a more efficient one.

The Beginnings of the Language

We come to know in the ancient books of India of an Odra language as well as of an Odra tribe. There is no mention anywhere of a separate language spoken by the Kalingas or the Utkalas, the other two tribes who once dominated what is now Orissa. So Odra seems to be the indigenous tongue of this region. Bharata's *Natyasastra* describes the Odra language as a Vibhasha, which is a sort of dialect born out of the association of Sanskrit with an aboriginal language. Probably this referred to the linguistic corruption in ancient Orissa that Sanskrit may have undergone in this region through getting mixed up with the speech not only of the Odras but also of the Savaras, an aboriginal tribe that has left deep marks on the social and religious culture of the Oriyas. We have unfortunately no specimen of the literature of the Odra Vibhasha mentioned in Bharata's *Natyasastra* other than a single couplet quoted in the *Prakrita Sarvasva* of Markandeya Dasa. Even this couplet, however, answers Bharata's definition of a Vibhasha, being a localised Sanskrit—a characteristic that can be most justifiably attributed even to present-day Oriya. The Savaras are still in their aboriginal state, without even a script, not to speak of a literature. The Odras, however, are now completely Aryanised and form the vast mass of the tillers of the soil in Orissa. Being looked upon by linguists as the fountain-head of undefiled Oriya, the racy folk-speech, smelling of the rice-fields and the village street, of these Odra cultivators, unconscious of their patronymic heritage, does indeed supply acceptable proof that theirs was perhaps the original language that has stamped Orissa, the land of the Odras, with a cultural individuality of her own.

The Aryans, with their Sanskrit culture, must have arrived on the soil of Orissa in the very dim past. Even by the time of the *Mahabharata,* Orissa had become 'holy' with centres

of pilgrimage established. That could have been possible only through the prevalence of Brahmin culture in Orissa over a long period previous to the time of the *Mahabharata.* But we all know that the proud Brahmin in the past had nothing but contempt for the speech of the common folk. The common man, throughout ancient times, was illiterate not only in Orissa but all over India, as he is even today. It is no wonder therefore that we have no literature of the Odra Vibhasha, once the speech of the common man of Orissa, except the specimen couplet in Markandeya's *Prakrita Sarvasva.* Most probably it was just a spoken medium of communication between the Aryan colonisers and the local tribes.

Asoka's Edicts

It must be recorded, however, to the great credit of the most humane and democratic religion of Lord Buddha that the common people of India first became articulate under the warm inspiration of His Noble Dhamma. With the conquest of Kalinga by Asoka in the 3rd century B.C., we get historic utterances made on Orissa's soil in a language that is called Magadhi Prakrit. Scholars are of the opinion that it is from this Magadhi Prakrit or just Prakrit that the entire group of Eastern-Indian languages, viz. Assamese, Bengali, and Oriya, has derived. Though in Asoka's time this Magadhi Prakrit, as expressed in the rock edicts at Dhauli and the pillar edict at Jaugada, might or might not have been an alien tongue to the local people, different from the local Odra Vibhasha of *Natyasastra,* these imperial inscriptions of the great emperor, so deeply dyed with local and topical matters, may be taken as the earliest extant literary expression in the ancient land of the Odras and the Kalingas.

The two edicts which are still extant in Orissa, at Dhauli and Jaugada, are addressed to the local councillors and executive officers of the Empire, commanding them to treat the people of Kalinga and the tribals of the borderlands with sympathy and deference. These contain the grandest and the noblest sentence ever uttered by any head of State in the whole history of mankind, viz., 'All human beings are my children; I wish for their good in this as well as in the other

world, as I do in respect of my own'—words that fit in so well with the character of the great king that was Asoka, on the one hand, and the cosmopolitan quality of Orissa's culture on the other. Orissa may feel deservedly proud that such noble sentiments were uttered by that great Indian emperor on her soil alone in the whole of his extensive empire. They could as well be put into the mouth of Jagannatha at Puri today, Jagannatha, within the precincts of whose temple all castes merge automatically into one humanity, alone of all places of pilgrimage in India.

Kharavela Inscription—Earliest Indigenous Literary Expression

Soon after the death of Asoka, Kalinga again became an independent kingdom and a century and half later we see the emergence of a great conqueror in Kharavela whose empire spread over about two-thirds of the Indian sub-continent. He appears to have been a patriotic Kalinga, not only for having invaded and conquered Magadha just to avenge the national insult of Asoka's Kalinga war, but also because he left a record of his retributive victories on the ceiling of the Hatigumpha in Udayagiri near Bhubaneswara, directly overlooking Asoka's edicts on the Dhauli hill four miles off, almost in a spirit of triumphant challenge.

Linguistically, Kharavela's Hatigumpha inscription is definitely different from the edicts of Asoka and much closer to the present-day Oriya. This little chronicle of the Kalinga Emperor Kharavela of the 1st century B.C. may therefore be taken to be the earliest genuine indigenous literary expression in Orissa. The language of this inscription has a definite artistic flair, befitting a grandiose record of a great king's charities as well as of his military exploits. There is no doubt that the person who composed this little narrative had the making of a literary craftsman. The edicts of Asoka, in spite of their grand humanistic flavour, read definitely as Imperial directives. The Kharavela chronicle is in complete contrast. It is almost an Ode on military conquest and imperial grandeur, written in a befitting grand manner.

This Hatigumpha inscription of Kharavela has assumed unusual importance in Indian cultural history in that it is the

one historical record that gives us glimpses into the thorough and liberal training which an heir-apparent in ancient India had to undergo. The cave-chronicle says that Prince Kharavela was trained not only in the military arts, but also in 'literature, mathematics, the social sciences and politics'. He is also said to have organised dances and dramatic performances and engaged expert performers to provide entertainment for the citizens of his own capital as well as foreign visitors. All this shows that Orissa, even twenty centuries ago, had a highly developed social culture. The rock-cut cave-palace that Kharavela is supposed to have built (as mentioned in the Hatigumpha inscription itself) for his pious first queen on the Udayagiri hill near Bhubaneswara, stands witness to this cultural ascendance of the Oriyas two thousand years ago. The sculptural frieze on the walls of the balcony of this cave palace is surprisingly excellent in its realism, naturalness and vitality and in the high level of craftsmanship displayed.

Pali—Language of Orissa ?

Associated with the twin faiths of Jainism and Buddhism and also with the successive ruling dynasties, Pali-Prakrit must have been the cultural language of Orissa with, of course, local variations, for about a thousand years. What exactly the contribution of the Oriyas to Pali or Prakrit was it is not easy to say now, but it is undisputed that Markandeya Dasa, the author of the most celebrated Prakrit grammar, *Prakrita Sarvasva*, referred to above already, was an Oriya. This, coupled with the other equally important fact, that Kharavela's Hatigumpha inscription happens to be the only Pali inscription in the whole of India, has given rise to the theory that Pali is the indigenous language of Kalinga or Orissa, and that it was the Kalingas who carried it to Ceylon, the present home of the vast Pali literature. This literature has left behind no trace in the entire Indian sub-continent, other than this inscription of Kharavela. This plausible theory, started by no less an authority than Oldenburg, the great German Indologist, and supported by other eminent Western Indologists, is now finding powerful advocacy in Dr Nabina Kumara Shahoo, the young Oriya historian, who has

specialised on Buddhism in Orissa. It is not for me, however, but for historians and research scholars to deliver the final verdict on such controversies.

Oriya at the Time of Hiuen Tsang's Visit

We come across the next reference to the language of the region in the travelogue of Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese traveller and scholar. That was in the 7th century A.D. The great traveller says: 'The words and language of this region [the land of the Odras] differ from the speech of central India.' This at least proves that by that time the common speech of the Oriyas had acquired a distinct individuality of its own. Says Dr. Mahatab in his *History of Orissa* (1st edition, p. 53): 'The beginnings of the Oriya language may be traced to this period. All the inscriptions and grants of the Bhauma Kings (6th to 8th centuries) were written in beautiful Sanskrit verse and metre, but here and there Sanskrit words with Oriya pronunciation can be clearly discerned.'

By this time the Brahminic revival that had started with the Imperial Guptas in North India, in the 4th century A.D., had firmly established itself in Orissa. Hiuen Tsang, wherever he went in Orissa, saw Buddhist viharas and Brahminic temples flourishing side by side. The prevalent Buddhism was of the Mahayana variety, and certain Mahayana shrines, like the present shrine of Jagannatha, attracted devotees of all denominations, both Buddhist and Brahminic.

The rulers of the land during this period, the Bhauma-Karas, though outwardly Buddhist, were essentially Brahminic. They issued all their grants in sonorous Sanskrit, composed certainly by Brahmins. They are the kings who started the tradition of constructing magnificent temples that culminated in the miracle of Konarak in the 13th century A.D.

But in spite of the rulers' leanings towards Sanskrit, the people at large and the Buddhist intellectuals who were in close touch with them, still expressed themselves in a common language of their own which, by that time, as an Apabhramsa, had come much closer to modern Oriya than either the edicts of Asoka or Kharavela's inscription. The common religion was at that time nothing but Mahayana, corrupted by Tantric elements called Vajrayana, which is supposed to have

originated in this part of India. The whole of North Orissa is still full of the ruins of Buddhist monasteries where monks of these new religious denominations carried on their spiritual disciplines. For the edification of the common people some of them wrote songs and psalms, putting in them the esoteric wisdom of their faith. The language of these was contemporary and the metaphors used were within the daily experience of the common man.

We will discuss these Buddhist songs and psalms in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

SOME BUDDHIST POEMS IN APABHRAMSA ORIYA

The Buddhist poems discovered in the Nepal State Library, at the beginning of this century, throw a flood of light on the development not only of the Eastern vernaculars of India, but also on the popular faiths in those centuries. In the fine introduction to his book, *Bauddha Gan o Doha*, M.M.H.P. Sastri, the discoverer of these songs, says (p. 6): 'I believe those who wrote in this language (i.e. that of these Buddhist songs and psalms) were of Bengal or the *neighbouring countries*.' He admits again in the same introduction at page 17, that 'one poet's domicile happens to be Orissa, and his song also is written in the Oriya language. I have taken that to be an Oriya poem.' But strangely enough he forgot to name this suspposed Oriya poem or the poet.

But the question might naturally arise as to how just one single Oriya poem in Oriya characters could get itself squeezed into an anthology of poetry, taken entirely to be belonging to some other language? Scores of words used in these poems, historic associations, the general milieu, and the continuity of the spirit of the poems through literary traditions down to modern times, all declare in no unmistaken terms that quite a good number of these poems were composed in Orissa, if not in Oriya, as Oriya as such did not exist at that time, any more than Bengali or Assamese. These poems, as a matter of fact, are as remote from either modern Bengali or modern Oriya, as Langland's *Piers Plowman* is from any book in modern English, though both are taken to be English. Parochial pride taken by any region in these poems can be justified only if their interpretation is found to hinge on words now current in that particular region and found nowhere else in exactly the same sense, or by direct or circumstantial evidence of history or geography of that region.

Take for instance the most romantic poem in the whole

anthology, the one that begins with 'The high hills, where the Savari lady resides'. As generally interpreted, this poem narrates the well-decorated and 'naturally beautiful' (*Sahaja-sundari*) Savari in a forest on a high hill, beseeching the 'mad' Savara (her husband) to pay attention to his 'own wife'. The Savari, decked out with peacock feathers and ear-ornaments, however roams alone in the forest and the Savara spends the night in great pleasure with Nairamoni Dari who, according to the generally accepted interpretation, is taken to be the same Savari herself, the Savara's wife. In the *sabda-suchi* at the back of M.M.H.P. Sastri's edition of these songs and psalms, the word '*dari*' means 'daughter'. That makes the meaning horrid.

But the whole poem gets back its true, natural, romantic colour if we understand the key-word 'Dari'. This is a pure Oriya word, current coin even now, and means a hetaera or a courtesan, the enticer of menfolk. The poem starts with the naturally attractive (*Sahaja-sundari*) wife of Savara, beseeching her 'mad' (*unmatta*) husband to stay with her. But, for all her beauty and decoration, the Savari has to roam the forests alone. The mad Savara leaves Savari (the naturally attractive world) and sleeps with the Dari Nairamoni (the Buddhist soul-lessness). Thus the Savara (the Yogi) obtains Nirvana and disappears into the heights of mystic experience (*Giribara Sihara Sandhi*).

Again, the last half of the last line of this poem is interpreted as 'How can the Savara fight?' which makes no sense here. The word *lodai* is taken to mean 'to fight' (*ladhai*), but *lodai* in Oriya means 'to seek to find', and here the logical and natural sense is in accord with this. The Savara has disappeared in the mountain heights (of mystic experiences) and how will the Savari now seek and find him?

The message of this whole poem by the poet Savaripada, rests on the contrast between the naturally attractive wife (i.e. the world) and the Dari, the enticer, the hetaera, Nairamoni or Nirvana. The poet showers all his imaginative blessings on the Savari (the worldly life) to make her appear attractive, and mentions the Dari Nairamoni in the barest terms. But yet the Savara spends the night with the un-attractive Dari (soul-lessness) leaving the apparently beautiful

and well-decorated Savari (the world) to roam the forests by herself. The Savara has so completely disappeared into the other region, that it is useless for the Savari even to try to seek (*lodai*) him.

There are dozens of other words like the word '*dari*' and *lodai* in these Buddhist songs and poems, which are universally current coin in modern Oriya even today but perhaps not current in any other modern Indian language. 'Routa', as an illustration again, is a typical Oriya surname and is part of thousands of Oriya names even today. Associated with the nobility and the military castes of Orissa, Routa and Routaray are almost household words in Orissa. Even great kings of Orissa like Kapilendra Deva were proud to call themselves Routaray (C-in-C). (*cf.*—Sachi Routaray, the poet). Hence it is logical to suppose that the poet Bhusuku Routa of this anthology belonged to what now is Orissa. This Bhusuku is supposed to have been a person of royal blood in his worldly life, known by the name of Santi Deva. In the traditions of the ex-Keonjhar State in Orissa (the old Jahar Kingdom) the memory of a Santi Deva, a ruling king who renounced the world and turned a monk, is still alive. Indeed the cave of his meditation is still pointed out in a spot which is full of the remains of a once-flourishing and extensive Buddhist monastery and college. This area is still waiting for the spade of the archaeologist. The poems attributed to Bhusuku Routa corroborate also the author's aristocratic upbringing and some systematic academic training. His poems abound in metaphors of hunting, a royal custom, and are, of all the poems in the anthology, the most elegant and scholarly, thus indicating trained scholarship. All this linguistic, geographical and traditional evidence just cannot be ignored.

The fact that quite a good number of these poems are dialogues between a Savara and a Savari or addressed to them, again bring these songs and poems closer to Orissa than perhaps to any other part of India. The Odras (modern Oriyas) and the Savaras, as has already been pointed out, have co-existed from time immemorial. Even now, within 25 miles of Cuttack, the metropolis of Orissa, there are colonies of Savaras still living in their traditional way. Acceptance by the Odras of the Savara-god, Neelamadhaba, as their common tribal deity

has, ultimately, revolutionised Hinduism through the evolution of Jagannatha (*vide* Chapter VIII). And even now the Savara and Savari appear as the chief dramatis personae in many a popular play in Orissa. The entire *Danda-yatra Suango*, a universal mystery play of rural Orissa, rests on the events that happen in the forest to a couple, Parna-savara and Parna-savari, well-known symbolic personalities of the Tantra cult.

The Territorial Location

The latest research as to the location of Uddiyana, the motherland of Buddhist Tantra, is likely also to upset all our previous ideas of the domicile of the poets of these Tantric Buddhist poems. There are so many places in Orissa associated with the traditions of Luipa, Kanhnupa, Savaripa, Daripa and Dhenkipa. On these Dr Nabina Kumara Shahoo, the young Oriya scholar, has brought to bear convincing arguments in favour of identifying Uddiyana with Orissa. In his recently published book *Buddhism in Orissa* (Utkal University) he says in conclusion (pp. 152-54), refuting all the arguments of Drs Sylvain Levi and P. C. Bagchi:

'Many of the Tantric Siddhas, like Saraha, Lui, Savaripa and others who are regarded by Tibetan and other sources as belonging to Uddiyana, have composed large numbers of religious songs and Dohas, the language of which is claimed to be the parent stock of the modern Oriya, Bengali, and Maithili tongues. We fail to understand as to why all these Siddhas, if they hailed from the Swat Valley, would not write a single piece of song in the language then prevalent in the north-west of India and express their religious and poetic sentiments in the dialects of eastern India. Evidently Uddiyana was situated in the east, not in north-west of India in the Swat Valley region. The noteworthy fact in this connection is that no Tantric images of any importance have yet been recovered from the Swat Valley.... It may be said that the goddessess, Kurukulla and Vajravarahi, who are described in Tantric literature as the presiding deities of Uddiyana, are found only in Orissa and nowhere else in India. ... Thus, all the evidence, traditional, historical, literary and archaeological, point out the fact that the country of Uddiyana which is regarded as the cradle of Tantric Buddhism, may not be located far off in

the Swat Valley and that its identification with Orissa may now be accepted.'

The Congenial Milieu

The historical probability of these Buddhist poets flourishing exactly in this period in Orissa appears also to be quite overwhelming. The period contemporaneous with these songs and psalms was not only one of glory and prosperity in the history of Orissa, but an age of Buddhist supremacy (as just referred to in the previous chapter) under the Bhauma Kings, who were great patrons of art, literature and religion. Under them Orissa saw her first grand flowering of art and architecture. Says Dr Mahatab in his *History of Orissa* (p. 53).:

'During the Bhauma rule the Buddhist art and culture made their influence felt all over Utkal. Remains of Buddhist art and architecture of that period have been discovered at Khiching in Mayurbhanj, in Baud, at Chaudhwar near Cuttack and plenty of them have been found at Udayagiri and Ratnagiri. It is held by competent scholars and critics that the Orissan art of that period is the best of all that has been produced up till now....On the whole, the Bhauma period constitutes a glorious age in the history of Orissa. In culture and civilisation, art and architecture and in learning and education, Orissa attained to unprecedented heights. The Oriya society of the modern times retains unmistakable signs of Bhauma culture. The very foundation of the Oriya nation as a separate political entity was laid under the Bhaumas.'

It is known to every student of Indian history that a Bhauma King of Orissa, Santikara Deva, sent Prajña, the great Buddhist missionary, to China with a Buddhist scripture written in his own royal hand as a present to the Chinese emperor. No wonder therefore that Buddhist poets like Kanhupada, Savarapada and Luipada must have flourished in Orissa in the congenial Buddhist regime of the Bhaumas along with great Buddhist artists and scholars who have glorified this period as described above. The poets most probably lived in Buddhist monasteries and colleges, built and maintained by the devout Bhaumas. The whole of north Orissa is dotted with the extensive ruins of these ancient institutions.

The spirit and content of these Buddhist poems keep coming up again and again, age after age, in an almost continuous process, symbolising the eternal undercurrent in the Oriya culture of the Natha-Mahayanic philosophy of life. The *Charya Padas* of 7th-9th centuries, the *Sisu Veda* of the 14th, the works of the Pancha Sakhas in the 15th, *Mahimandala Gita* of Arakshita Dasa in the 17th, the Bhajanas of Bhima Bhoi in the 18th and the poems of Madhusudana Rao in the 19th century make a continuous and consistent record of the manifestation of the deep, genuine religious feelings of the Oriya people. These Buddhist poems in the Eastern Indian Apabhramsa of the 7th-9th centuries are only the beginning of a genre of religious poetry that has been, in different forms, suitable to the succeeding ages, instinctively adopted by the spiritual poets of Orissa down to contemporary times.

And a poem such as the one presented below (in free rendering) from this Buddhist anthology might be a literary composition representing any Adivasi area in Orissa even today. The Taila land (newly reclaimed jungle) is still being prepared with the Adivasi axe (*kuradhi*) for the plantation of his favourite crops of kangoo and jahna (*cheena*). The whole of this poem smells of the natural set-up of any village in the hilly parts of Orissa.

'Deep forest has been turned into Taila field with the axe and always at hand is the wife Nairamoni, who uproots all undersirable new shoots. Having freed himself of the bothersome attraction of the thickets, the Savara now moves in great bliss in the company of the enchantress Sunya. . . . Beyond the Taila field rises the jahna crops like sky-flowers in darkness. With the ripe kangoo and cheena crops at hand, the Savaras and the Savaris have become drunk and the Savara refuses to rouse himself from that great bliss. The Savara has put up scarecrows all around his fields, and now as he enjoys the roasted corn, the she-jackal whines outside for want of anything to eat.'

CHAPTER V

THE INTERREGNUM OF SANSKRIT

Between the Apabhramsa Buddhist poetry of 7th-9th centuries and the *Sisu Veda* of an anonymous poet and the *Rudrasudhanidhi* of Avadhuta Narayana Swami in the 13th century, no literary work in the common language of Orissa has as yet been traced. And searches are most unlikely to succeed because, during this period of four to five centuries, Sanskrit-based Brahmanism held an almost totalitarian sway over the land. The Buddhist Bhaumakaras became, practically in no time at all, ardent devotees of all varieties of Hindu gods and goddesses. And there are distinct traditions as well as records to prove that there were systematic persecutions of the Buddhists during the reigns of the Imperial Gangas and the Solars who followed the Bhaumas. This should not surprise anybody, as this was the period of the great Hindu revivalists, such as Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva and Nimbarka. Each of them visited Orissa and established his zonal headquarters at Puri for the propagation and establishment of his faith in the eastern zone of India.

But the pity was that the vehicle of all these revived Hindu faiths was Sanskrit, to which the common people had no access. Buddhism and its concomitant popular culture was gone. Viharas fell into decay. Entire Buddhist communities appear to have left the deltaic areas to settle in remote jungle lands, for safety from persecution. The masses got Hindu gods and goddesses in place of the Buddhist prototypes, but now they were deprived of the healthy sublimating association with the linguistic vehicle of the religion they followed. The situation was very much unlike that created by the Buddhist Sangha.

The resentment the people felt against the totalitarian domination of Sanskrit and their silent demand in favour of the common language are also clearly discernible. In the midst of the innumerable gift-records and panegyrics to kings in dignified Sanskrit, we get even by the 11th century (A.D. 1050), just within a hundred years or so of the Buddhist poems in

Apabhramsa, the inscription of Ananta Varma Vajrahasta Deva, King of Kalinga, in hesitant modern Oriya. This is supposed to be the earliest inscription so far found in any modern North Indian language. The Bhubaneswara temple inscription of the 13th century, along with other distinct literary compositions in prose and poetry, clearly display the undoubted emergence of Oriya as we know it today. It was a revolution indeed and that too absolutely total in character, perhaps a retributive challenge, in favour of the language of the people of the land.

Devoted to Sanskrit, the intellectuals of Orissa, however, produced during those four or five centuries, an enormous amount of Sanskrit literature. Families of brilliant scholars kept on producing books continuously for generations together. And even kings aspired to the glory of authorship in Sanskrit. Most of this literature lies unpublished and may remain so, being just of the stereotyped categories. But the scholars of Orissa have left behind them, composed in that language of Gods, books in all branches of human knowledge except philosophy. Commentaries on almost every well-known book in Sanskrit are plentiful. This was a dire necessity, perhaps, as an adjunct to the study of Sanskrit in schools and colleges, as well as at home in those days, for competent teachers were always in short supply. Grammars made easy appeared, perhaps, for the same reason. Books on law (*smritis*) are as numerous as the commentaries, indicating the tight grip of the priestly class on the whole of society.

Of these colossal literary remains of a completely bygone age in Orissa, some at least have turned out precious and important enough to cast long shadows all over India, even down to modern times. Such, for example, as the *Gitagovinda* of Jayadeva, the *Anargha Raghava Nataka* by Murari Misra, the *Aryasaptasati* by Govardhanacharya, *Sahridayananda Mahakavya* by Krishnananda Mahapatra, *Bharatamrita Mahakavya* by Divakara Misra, and *Bhaktivaibhava Nataka* of Jivadevacharya are creative works. *Changu Karika* by Changu Dasa, *Prabandha Chandrika* by Baijala Deva, Maharaja of ex-Patna State, the *Sahitya Darpana* by Visvanatha Mahapatra and the *Jumara Darpana* by Netrananda Sahityapanchanana discuss grammar and poetics. The *Sangita Prakasha* by Krishna Dasa

Badajena Mahapatra, *Sangita Kalpalata* by Haladhara Misra, *Sangitanarayana* by Purushottama Misra, *Sangita Sarani* by Narayana Misra, and *Natya Manorama* by Raghunatha Ratha deal with music and dance. The *Pancha Siddhanta Vasvati* of Satananda Acharya and the *Siddhanta Darpana* of Samanta Chandrasekhara Simha deal with astronomy.

The two books in Sanskrit that have exercised the deepest influence in the world of religion and literature of Orissa are the *Jnanasiddhi* by King Indrabhuti (7th century) of Sambalpur, the prophet of Vajrayana and the *Gitagovinda* of Jayadeva. Religion not being our field, we leave *Jnanasidhi* out of our consideration, but the *Gitagovinda* will be discussed in Chapter VIII in its bearings on the development of Oriya poetry. That Indrabhuti, the prophet of Vajrayana, begins his book with salutations to Jagannatha, the present Hindu God, shows the happy compromise that was being made on the soil of Orissa for a synthesis of Buddhism and Brahmanism. The compromise did take place. But it was Brahmanism that triumphed in the long run, completely assimilating its rival within its catholic folds. We shall have to review this process as it has revealed itself in subsequent Oriya literature, in a forthcoming chapter.

CHAPTER VI

GLIMMERINGS OF THE DAWN

Earliest Poetry and Prose in Modern Oriya

The earliest Oriya record to be found at present, as already mentioned, is the inscription dated A.D. 1051 of Ananta Varma Vajrahasta Deva, King of Kalinga. It is supposed to be the earliest inscription in any modern Indian language of the Indo-Germanic family. The Bhubaneswara Temple inscription of the 13th century proves beyond any doubt that the Oriya language had been slowly evolving itself for quite a long time. But Oriya as we know it today appears to have clearly emerged only during the 13th-14th centuries, definitely the period of the epics of Sarala Dasa, the lyrical ballad *Kesava koili* by Markanda Dasa, and the prose poem *Rudrasudhanidhi* of Avadhuta Narayana. Carrying unmistakable signs of their antiquity, all these and many more works, now definitely assigned to this period by scholars, are interestingly archaic, without being at all unintelligible. These have also another great and vital common factor—the contemporary major religious tenets.

The Changing Religious Tenets

After the Bhaumas, who ruled Orissa up to 7th-8th centuries and under whom Buddhist poetry and Buddhist art flourished as we have already noted, came the Somas, who are supposed to have brought the traditional Brahmanic religion to Orissa in an organised manner. Yayati Kesari of this dynasty is reputed to have brought one thousand blue-blooded Brahmins from Kanyakubja (Kanauj) and settled them in his kingdom to provide a solid foundation for the Vedic and Brahmanic Church. Soon after came Saivite Sankara from the south (8th century A.D.) and established one of his four great *mathas* at Puri.

The Buddhism that was prevalent in Orissa for over a millenium previous to this period was mostly of the Mahayana denomination. This has left the concept and worship of the Void, *Sunya*, as an inherent part of the religious consciousness

of the masses in Orissa. We shall be meeting this phenomenon again and again in subsequent chapters. Mahayana Buddhism, again, by the 8th-9th centuries had become practically fused with the cult of Tantra. Innumerable Buddhist Tantric images now found among the ruins of such famous ancient Buddhist settlements as the Ratnagiri and Lalitgiri viharas in the Cuttack district of Orissa prove this fact beyond any doubt. Hence the change-over from a Mahayana Buddhism corrupted by Tantra to Tantric Siva-Saktism, must have been accomplished quite easily by the missionaries of the latter faith in Orissa.

The net result was that Orissa became dominantly a land of the Siva-Sakti cult for nearly five or six centuries, after having been Buddhist for a millenium. Like the preceding Buddhism this new faith too expressed itself both in the artistic magnificence that we find in the temple-city of Bhubaneswara, and in the literature of the land. The Siva-Sakti cult has coloured the entire contemporary literature. As a matter of fact it is this particular colour, along of course with other internal evidence, that has enabled scholars to date these works, major and minor, as belonging to this particular period.

The Nathas

But in between the Buddhists and the open avowal of the Siva-Sakti followers come the Nathas, the sect that embodied in its faith a glorious compromise of Buddhism and Saivism. As in many other modern Indian literatures, in Oriya also, the entire credit of ushering in modern literature appears now, as a result of recent discoveries and researches, to go to these humble unostentatious Nathas, who are a small but important and highly respected sect in Orissa even today, completely oblivious of the great national role they have played. For centuries these Nathas or Natha-Yogis, as they are generally called in Orissa, have been the unofficial moral preceptors of rural Orissa. They generally move about from village to village and beg alms, singing ballads and *bhajanas*, rich with moral and spiritual lore, to the tune of the one-stringed *kendra*, their own simple musical instrument. The visit of a Natha-Yogi to a village with his quaint music and ancient ballads is an unforgettable event and leaves a deep nostalgic

impression in the psychology of all Oriya adults who find themselves wrenched away from the rural environs of their childhood days. In the popular religion of Orissa, the concept of the *pinda-brahmanda-tattva* (macrosom in microcosm) was added by the Nathas to that of the Void of the Mahayanists. Together, these form the core of the metaphysical understanding of the world and of himself possessed by the average Oriya.

The two earliest books in modern Oriya are definitely from the missionary pens of two humble anonymous Nathas. These are the *Sisu Veda* and the *Saptanga*. Gorakhanatha, on whom the latter book has been fathered, surely does not belong to Orissa. Hence that great Siddha, the celebrated founder of the Natha-cult, could not, by any stretch of imagination, be the author of this Oriya book. Most probably it was written by a Natha who, submerging his own little self in that of the Master, passed the book off in the Master's name. It has, however, no literary value whatsoever. Its archaic language alone endows it with great chronological importance. It merely deals with the astrological superstitions regarding the week days, the stars and planets and with the esoteric yogic practices for spiritual realisation.

The Sisu Veda

The other book, *Sisu Veda*, is a remarkable production in more ways than one. Saivite in content, it is linguistically the last lingering echo of the Buddhist Apabhramsa compositions of the 7th-9th centuries that we have already discussed. This *Sisu Veda* is the unmistakable visible link between that Apabhramsa and the modern Oriya of Sarala Dasa or Markanda Dasa, thus completing the chain that started with the chronicle of Kharavela in the 1st century B.C. and evolved slowly but steadily by a simple natural process.

Though dealing with the esoteric knowledge of Tantra, this *Sisu Veda* is written throughout in some of the lilting metres of the Buddhist lyrics, and hence it is pleasant both to read and to hear. Here is a sample of its contents:

> Like a crane that does not disturb the water
> Keep thou thy mind and breath calm,

Only when thou makest the crane and the fish
the same undifferentiated,
Shall thy body understand Life.
(stanza 21)

Much more remarkable than the verses are the prose commentaries following each verse in this book. This archaic prose speaks its own antiquity. It has the hesitant manner and the half-articulate character of a pioneer attempt. It undoubtedly belongs to the same category as the temple inscriptions of the 12th-13th centuries. There is no doubt that this is the earliest literary prose in Oriya. The translation of the commentary to the stanza quoted above, reads like this:

'What is crane is the mind. What is fish is the breath. Water is the drop (*bindu*). If mind and breath are identified, both crane and fish shall be immobilised. This indeed is *sahaja samadhi*.'

The Natha cult has deeply influenced Orissa's religious culture—so deeply that it has practically lost its own identity, and become an integral part of her common thought. But these two books, *Saptanga* of Gorakhanatha and the *Sisu Veda*, written at the inaugural period of the Natha cult, remain unmistakably sectarian in their contents. Linguistically, they are the last mile-posts of the ancient Oriya language on the road to modern Oriya. These two books stand clearly apart from all the other forerunners of Sarala Dasa.

PROSE

And of these others, the prose pieces, from all the internal evidence, appear, strangely enough, to be older than the poems attributed to this period. All the small poems assigned to this period are so definitely more polished than the lines either of Sarala's epic or of the prose pieces that no claim of their authors to be more ancient than the anonymous prose writers can really stand. The Asokan edicts, the Kharavela chronicle, the temple inscriptions and the prose commentary of the *Sisu Veda* give us a clear enough picture of a long tradition of prose writing in Orissa, from ancient times. As a matter of fact, the *Rudrasudhanidhi*, the earliest complete

prose work in Oriya, that we shall be discussing presently, appears to be a sister composition to Kharavela's chronicle. Both are written in a magnificent *kavya*-style, though one is in Oriya and the other in ancient Pali.

'Rudrasudhanidhi' of Avadhuta Narayana Swami

The placing of this book in the 13th century A.D., as has been done by most Oriya scholars, may not really be far from the fact. And for a pioneering venture it is surprisingly excellent.

Nothing is known about the author except that he was a resident of Bhubaneswara. He appears from his book to have been a learned man carefully trained in academies. His name indicates that he had renounced the world and must have spent his life either as a wandering mendicant (*avadhuta*) or as a Sannyasi-teacher in a *matha*. The latter seems to be more probable as otherwise, as a wandering sadhu, he could not have devoted the time and attention required to a work of this nature. Without doubt he was a Saivite mendicant and this work *Rudrasudhanidhi* (the Treasure Casket of the Nectar of Rudra) was meant, naturally, to propagate the virtues and powers of his personal God.

The story of the book runs like this. A good king named Anangapadmakara happened to be childless. He worshipped Siva praying for a child. The lord, pleased with the king's devotion, wished to send one of his own Ganas, or followers who were dedicated to His worship and practised in Yoga, down to earth below as King Anangapadmakara's well-merited future heir. In order to choose one, the Lord requested Parvati to create a lovely maiden out of Her Spirit and let her move among the Lord's followers, all noted for high asceticism. Accordingly, the maiden Trailokyamohini (the Enchantress of Three Worlds) was born. Abhinava Chaitanya, one of the Ganas, fell a victim to her charms. And he, therefore, was commanded by the Lord Siva to go down to the earth for another spell of human existence, as his Yogic consummation was still imperfect. Poor Abhinava Chaitanya, now very penitent, appealed to the Lord for mercy, begging him not to throw him into the miseries of terrestrial life again. The Lord consoled him, saying that he would be born as

the son of a good king and a devout queen and that, after living out his own life as a good king also, he would ultimately return permanently to the Kaivalyadhama, the Hindu Paradise. And so it came to pass.

Combining the qualities of prose and poetry, more of the latter than of the former, this book is quite unique in character. Its merit is not merely chronological. It is unique for its creativeness, artistic execution, and romantic imagination. It combines in itself in beautiful harmony, romance and austerity, asceticism and sensuousness, classical dignity and romantic freedom. The Sannyasi author was, essentially in his spirit, a poet and a romantic. While externally he was an *avadhuta*, devoted to the austere Siva, in his heart of hearts this scholar-poet was really a lover and a worshipper of sensuous beauty. Otherwise the flamboyant, colourful atmosphere that he created in his narrative, the rhythmic imaginative diction he used with such ease and the insight he has shown into human situations, would not have been possible.

This piece is so surcharged with poetry that though it is undoubtedly prose, the lines somehow rhyme almost after every third sentence. Most certainly that was unintentional, and was perhaps the natural result of the rich alliterative and rhythmic prose that the author employed for his work, as the medium fit for his mythological and romantic story. While as poetry this prose-book, *Rudrasudhanidhi*, is one of the most effective, as prose also it is the best of the period because of its complete expressiveness and strong individuality.

This is how the Sannyasi-poet ushers the maiden Trailokyamohini into the hermitage of the Ganas for the Temptation:

'When they (Ganas) saw her, the elephants of their minds were drowned in the ocean of forgetfulness. How wonderfully was she fashioned to drag all happily into the net of Desires! It was as though Kāma with his arrows of flowers had come to life in her sly looks just in order to prevent Yogis from reaching their salvation. With Kama, the Spring too had arrived. And the moon came out in a clear sky to support her friend. The six seasons entered along with the Malayan breeze. The mind of youth began to warm. Dry trees

blossomed out. Bees kissed lotuses. The breeze from Malaya delicately fanned the breasts of the fair ones in Heaven. All refined considerations gave way. The cuckoos started singing. Birds swam in the lakes out of season. And flowers started kissing the bees in return. And so in the pleasure-forest of Rudra, both animate and inanimate were immersed in the dark dalliance of Kama.'

Midway between verse and prose, archaic in texture and deeply romantic in spirit, allegorical and religious in purpose, this work, *Rudrasudhanidhi*, by Avadhuta Narayana Swami, the Saivite sannyasi, stands out as a significant landmark in the development of Oriya literature—a natural step, it seems, in the process of the evolution of Oriya from the Buddhist psalms in the Apabhramsa of the 7th-9th centuries. And apart from its chronological significance, the book and its sannyasi-author command also our reverence after these six centuries for their sterling intrinsic merits. *Rudrasudhanidhi* would be treated with respect as a prose masterpiece in any language.

The Brata Kathas or The Votive Tales

Next in literary importance are the Brata Kathas universally current in Orissa, nobody knows for how long. It is from linguistic evidence and the rellgious worship advocated in these tales, that scholars have placed these in the 13th-14th century period. And they may not be very much wrong. The authors of all these tales are still unknown.

Of these prose tales the *Somanatha Brata Katha* and the *Nagala Chauthi* (*Nagachaturthi*) *Katha* centre round Siva and his symbol, but both lack the literary grace of *Rudrasudhanidhi*. These are plain narrations and no attempt is made at artistic polish or effective expression. The story of *Nagala Chauthi*, however, is given with charming clarity of delivery, by short, clear-cut sentences, e.g.:

'Ye fellow-humans, listen to the story of Nagala Chauthi. There was an overseas merchant. He had seven daughters-in-law. The youngest of them was neglected. After some time came the month of Aswina. And Kartika followed. Four days after the Pipaya Amabasya (the new moon day in the m onth o

Kartikà) came the Nagala Chauthi. The mistress of the house had an early morning bath. Materials for the fast were arranged after the bath. She brought sugarcane. She brought the bunch of bananas. She brought the bunch of coconuts. She brought the bunch of areca nuts. She made rice-pops (*lia*) and made balls of them with treacle. She made sweet balls of sesame also, etc.'

The Story of Ta'poi

But the most interesting of all these votive tales is the pathetic story of Ta'poi, advocating Sakti-worship. Due to its immense popularity in all the households of Orissa, the original prose tale has long been replaced by a simple narrative poem. But the characters, situation and the denominational worship, all indicate a very remote origin of this highly interesting story. It is certain that this story was publicised only to propagate the Sakti-cult in a popular manner among the common people, and particularily among womenfolk, without the paraphernalia of temples and priests. The lowly pathetic figure of Ta'poi in this story perhaps caught the imagination of the people, particularly of women, and thus made it universally accepted in Orissa. The story runs like this:

A merchant prince on the sea coast had seven sons and seven daughters-in-law and only one daughter, Ta'poi, the youngest in the family. The merchant's affairs were highly prosperous. This had always excited burning jealousy in a Brahmin widow of the neighbourhood. One day she found Ta'poi playing in the street with bamboo baskets along with other boys and girls of her age. The Brahmin lady told her, 'Ah, Ta'poi, you should be playing with a golden moon and silver baskets. What a shame for a rich man's daughter like you to play like these common children!' Ta'poi immediately demanded a golden moon and silver baskets from her parents. The old merchant felt such abuse of wealth preposterous. But the innocent girl was adamant in her demand. The fond parents yielded. But by the time the making of this golden moon and the silver baskets was only half-done the parents died. The sons thereafter took up their father's oversea business and made arrangements for going abroad. Before starting on their long and uncertain

journey they definitely told their wives to see to it that Ta'poi, their darling sister, was looked after just as she had been by their late parents and that every little wish of hers should be satisfied.

The wives were acting in accordance with their husbands' request when the Brahmin widow came on the scene again. She told the young ladies, "You are indeed fools to be busy all day to keep this girl in such comfort! It is she, when the brothers return, who will poison their ears against you and make your life hot. Beware of your sister-in-law, you silly women. She is your potential enemy!"

The picture changed immediately. Ta'poi, the darling daughter of the merchant-prince, was now told to look after the family goats. Soon she was in rags, and turned black with wandering in the jungles with a herd of goats, without food and drink. Only her youngest sister-in-law was kind to her and stealthily gave her food with which she sustained her frail body. One day in the month of Aswina, when the rivers were in flood, a male goat, the favourite of the eldest sister-in-law who was now the mistress of the house, got lost in the jungle. When Ta'poi brought the flock home that evening without the favourite animal, she was severely beaten by the eldest sister-in-law and sent back hungry and footsore into the jungle, to fetch it back. It was a dark night outside and raining. Ta'poi, poor girl, called the animal loudly and wandered about in the darkness. During that blind journey she stumbled upon the village goddess Mangala and kneeling down before her she offered her the handful of raw-rice bran (*khuda*) which the youngest sister-in-law had secretly tied in her apron when she was cruelly driven out of the house. There she worshipped and wept, bewailing her lot, not being conscious of the passage of time. About midnight a man approached her, attracted by the sound of her pathetic crying. After a few enquiries it was revealed that the visitor was no other than Ta'poi's youngest brother, who, along with her other brothers, had arrived at the port. Their ships were at anchor at the river-side, not far off from there. Ta'poi was taken to the ship, given a bath and clothes and jewellery. A message was sent to the wives to come and perform the ceremony of Boita-Bandana or the 'welcome to boats'. They came in the

morning, and when questioned, replied that Ta'poi was lying ill at home. They, except the wife of the youngest brother, were directed to go to the stern of the ship where there was a goddess to be worshipped. She was no other than Ta'poi herself in her new dress and jewellery. She sat with a sharp knife in her hand, and, as directed by her brothers, cut off the nose of each woman, one after another, as they approached her to worship her. They all fled in shame to the nearby jungle and were devoured by tigers. The brothers returned home with the wife of the youngest brother and Ta'poi, and got new wives and settled down in happiness.

Because of the *khuda* (rice bran) offered by Ta'poi to the goddess Mangala, this votive festival is known also in Orissa as *Khudukani Upabas* or the 'fast of rice-bran'. It is generally observed by unmarried girls in the villages in emulation of Ta'poi, to obtain the sympathy of brothers.

In a large number of folk tales in Orissa, as has been observed before, oversea trade and the merchants engaged in it (called Sadhabas) occur again and again. As part of the ceremonial observations of this particular fast of *Khudukani* described above, the young girls actually draw sketches of sea-going vessels in white paste over which the goddess Mangala's symbolic statue is made to stand. The story of Ta'poi represents perhaps the chaotic conditions into which families of maritime merchants fell during their long spells of absence abroad, a chaos in which the family was protected by the supposed saving grace of the goddess Mangala, for which she had to be devoutly worshipped.

Madala Panji

This is the most controversial book in prose in Oriya literature. In English it should be 'The Drum Chronicle', because of the drum-like shape the palm-leaf manuscripts of these records assume when bound together with strings. These are the records kept of Orissa kings, in the temple of Jagannatha, and still preserved in their ancient drum-shapes.

This prose-chronicle has two principal parts. In one part it describes the various ceremonies at the shrine of Jagannatha in all the details. These are being literally followed even today, down all these centuries. For the rights of the various

classes of employees in the temple, this Panji is still the sole authority.

In the other part it describes the ruling dynasties and the individual rulers of Orissa who traditionally, and without exception seem to have accepted Jagannatha as the Divine source of their sanction and the fountainhead of their mysterious spiritual influence on the people of Orissa, like that of the Mikado over the Japanese people. As a matter of fact the king of Orissa has generally been looked upon as the 'the Moving Vishnu'. The authors of this chronicle have pretended to trace the dynastic story of Orissa back to the beginning of creation, and naturally an otherwise excellent historical approach to men and matters in Orissa has been vitiated by lots of fantasies, untruths, exaggerations and inaccuracies.

This chronicle is supposed to have been started at the command of the first king of the Ganga dynasty, Chodaganga Deva of the 11th–12th century A.D. Three separate families of *karanas* (writers) have been keeping these records generation after generation, including that which is kept in the temple itself.

As the accounts of kings and dynasties as given in these *panjis* differ considerably in many places from available historical documents, historians have generally condemned them as unreliable. Many have even doubted that this chronicle was started so early as in the 12th century A.D. Dr. H. K. Mahatab is of the opinion that it was perhaps written in the 16th century A.D. by rival claimants to the throne of Orissa when Mansingh, Akbar's general, conquered Orissa, to prove their respective royal ancestry and titles.

This hyper-critical attitude towards the chronicle appears also rather fantastic and pretentious. Three separate persons could not have been engaged for such a purpose and even if so engaged, could not have produced almost similar narratives concerning innumerable dynasties and still more innumerable individual kings and queens. And how could all the three separate writers have recorded, for instance, a speech delivered by King Anangabhima Deva to an assembly of feudal chiefs in front of the temple of Jagannatha nearly three centuries back? Such a royal speech was not at all necessary to prove the title of the rival claimants to the throne of Orissa before

General Mansingh, in the 16th century, as is asserted by historians like Mahatab.

It is generally found also that the events recorded in this chronicle after the 12th century, i.e. after the advent of the Gangas, usually corroborate the facts given in inscriptions and other historical records. This supports the traditional belief that it originated in the time of Chodaganga Deva in the 12th century. In spite of interpolations, inaccuracies and fantasies, therefore, these prose records may be taken to have substance enough to prove their antiquity.

Written not by inspired writers but by professional employees of the state and the Temple, these records, however, have little literary value on the whole. We should concede to them merely the chronological prestige claimed for them by many. But these chronicles, like Holinshed's in English literature, have provided the raw material for excellent kavyas and natakas in Oriya through the many romantic legends found in their as yet unpublished pages. Their language is generally archaic, but uncouth and inartistic, lacking the ancient flavour. Their only worth as literature lies in the social pictures they represent (crude, fragmentary and inaccurate though these are) in the different historical periods. The speech by King Anangabhima Deva, referred to above, is one of the few excellent pieces, not only for the glimpse it gives of the feudal character of the state in the 12th-13th centuries, but also because of the nobility of the character of the speaker King Anangabhima Deva who repeatedly gave sound beatings to Moslem invaders and is also supposed to be the proud builder or renovator of the present temple of Jagannatha.

This King thus addresses his feudal chiefs and his cabinet, assembled on the occasion when the plan to rebuild the temple of Jagannatha was perhaps discussed:

'Ye future Maharajas, I appeal to you all not to violate the principles on which I have divided the State revenue to be expended. May you not think after me, "Why should we care for his arrangements?" This kingdom that the Gangas won from the Kesaris extended under the latter from the river Kansbansa (now in Midnapur district, West Bengal) in the north to the River Rishikulya in the south, and from the sea on

the east to the district of Bhimanagara in the west. The total income from this territory amounted to 7½ lakh tolas of gold. This kingdom we have won with the sword, and also through the blessings of Brahmins and mercy from the lotus feet of Lord Jagannatha. This we have extended again from Danaibudi river in the north to Rajamahendri in the south. In the west it is extended up to Baud-Sonepur. The new territories yield a revenue of 10 lakh tolas of gold. So, the total revenue of our State now comes up to 17½ lakh tolas of gold. This revenue we have divided among gods and Brahmins, among the different services, the army and the State reserve and other miscellaneous expenditure. Ye feudal chiefs, violate not these principles. The consequences of the sins of plunder and cheating are known to you through our scriptures. If you dare ever snatch away what I have given to various sections of my subjects, in the haughtiness of power, your sin will be no less than sacrilege against Lord Jagannatha Himself. Serve the Gods and Brahmins the way I have devised. Give the nobility a share of the revenue in cowries, the elephant keepers ten months' full pay, the infantry and the musketeers land with pay for ten months, and other services in the same manner, so that their families may be maintained. Adjusting this gold-based revenue system to surpluses and deficits, rule your subjects well. That alone will take you to heaven and make you happy on earth. Ye Maharajas, Dharma alone is the best of all achievements. Our booty out of conquests of old feudal lords in this land comes to about 40 lakh and 88 thousand tolas of gold. This is our self-acquired wealth. A part of this we want to utilise in the service of Lord Jagannatha. The temple built by king Yayati has grown dilapidated. We now plan to pull down the old one, and build in its place, a shrine 100 cubits high....'

So, it appears after all that the present shrine of Jagannatha, the holy of holies to the Hindus, was the unholy fruit of war loot! This is indeed strange irony for a Deity that is declared by the orthodox to be the Buddha Avatar, the God of non-violence!

POETRY

The Common Poetical Patterns

Some of the peculiar patterns of poetry to which the poets

in Orissa resorted, all through the old and medieval periods, appear to have originated and stabilised themselves during this period. These are: (i) the fourteen-lettered couplet, with its *Dandivritta* variety, (ii) the *koili* songs, and (iii) the *chautisa* ballads. These need some explanation for those not familiar with Oriya literature, and particularily because these come up presently for our discussion.

(i) *The Fourteen-lettered Couplet*

Called *payar* in Bengali and *asabari* or *kalasa* or just 14-lettered metre in Oriya, this simple metre has been glorified by its masterly effectiveness for narrative poetry in the hands of, first, Sarala Dasa in his *Mahabharata,* and then by Balarama Dasa in his *Ramayana,* a century later, probably in imitation of the old master. But both these masters took great liberties with the metre. Writing their epics with the anticipation of being recited and not read by the people, these genuine popular poets often adjusted the metre to the sentiments of the moment, rather than bind their muse to its strictly restrictive regularity. With the upsurge of emotions, or when the poets had more things to say than could be contained in the 14-lettered line, they felt free to sing on till they had finished their song. So, the so-called modern free verse is not new in Oriya literature. The free verse style of the 14-lettered couplet as demonstrated in the major works of both Sarala Dasa and Balarama Dasa is known in Orissa by the popular name of *Dandivritta,* from, perhaps, the word 'danda' meaning a street, a place for free movements, and may justifiably be translated as just 'free-verse'. Scholars have discovered such inequalities in Sarala Dasa's *Mahabharata*—one line may have 14 letters, and the next 34 letters. These, however, are rare instances. But these metrical variations and this unevenness not only do not present any difficulty to the general Oriya reader but definitely contribute to an excellent recitative effect of the lines. In the printed editions of these great works, however, great vandalism has been committed by ignorant printers who, imagining the uneven lines to have been the error of the scribes of the palm-leaf manuscripts, engaged pandits to regularise them. So, now, Sarala Dasa and Balarama Dasa lie in the printed books, crippled,

truncated, and twisted—though polished—shorn of much of their pristine vigour and grandeur.

Attempts are being made, however, to resuscitate the originals as far as is possible at this late hour.

The Koili Poems

Like the *Duta*-poems in Sanskrit literature, a number of celebrated poems in Oriya are addressed to the *koili* or the cuckoo. Hence, the generic nomenclature. Pundit Banambar Acharya, however, has made out a very convincing case that these are the Oriya imitation of the 'lo-li' songs in Prakrit; 'lo-li' being merely the musical refrain at the end of a couplet or a stanza. This is the most universal pattern of folk-lyric in Orissa. For publicity of modern ideas among the masses we have now 'Gandhi koili' and many others of that sort.

The Chautisa

This is a ballad, the stanzas of which, or couplets, are arranged according to the letters of the alphabet. The four and thirty letters, from Ka to Ksha, in the serial order of which the poem glides on, gives the name to this pattern. According to this, the first letter of the first two or four lines must begin with Ka, the first consonant of the Oriya alphabet, the lines in the second couplet or stanza begin with Kha, the second letter of the alphabet and so on till we come to the last letter, Ksha.

There are innumerable *chautisas* in Oriya. The Prachi Samiti has collected hundreds of them and publishd some in four volumes. Their contents are generally the poets' outpourings of their hearts for their loved ones or to the seasons, or meditations on the vanities of this terrestrial existence. The alphabetical order, like the restrictions of the European sonnet, gave the necessary reins to the generally unbridled effusion of the poets and at the same time gave the readers an excellent handle for memorisation. Because of this facility for easy memorisation and of the romantic nature of their content and their musical character, these *chautisas* were, and some still are, universally popular in Orissa. Some of them set the metrical pattern for later writers

in much bigger works. Some are lost, however, living for posterity only in the references made by later writers in their works about them.

The earliest Koili and Chautisa

The poem that is supposed to be the earliest in present Oriya, combines in itself the twin lyrical patterns of a *chautisa* and a *koili*. That is the *Kesava koili* of Markanda Dasa. It is the most famous of the *koili* songs in Oriya, in spite of being the most ancient among them. It is generally known as *Kesava koili* as the first line begins like this—'O Cuckoo, that Kesava has left for Mathura....'

Of its poet, Markanda Dasa, nothing has so far been discovered. Stranger still, this poet wrote this one little enchanting piece and had no inspiration for anything else. No other poet in Oriya literature is so universally celebrated with so small a contribution. But the poet richly deserves his celebrity as the little that he has left behind is indeed a 'gem of purest ray serene'.

For centuries this poem was the first text to be read in Orissa's village schools after the boys and girls became familiar with the alphabet. Village schools resounded in those days with the recitation of *Kesava koili* all through the afternoons. Fathers and uncles would stop at school doors to listen to their little ones' first readings of the *Kesava Koili* in the accepted rhythmic articulation, and mothers and aunts would lean out of windows to get a clearer audition of their darlings' first combined literary and musical performances—the recitation of this charming lyric.

This *Kesava koili* is indeed a charming piece. It describes mother Yasoda pouring out to the cuckoo, her feelings for her darling Krishna who left for Mathura with a promise to return soon, but decided not to, when he met his own parents there. It is this deeply pathetic sentiment of an ageing and sorrowing mother expressed in the simple, spontaneous native speech of the common man, with allusions to the common, day-to-day habits and customs of Oriya homes, that has made this little poem so popular all over Orissa, and that sends nostalgic thrills through the hearts of elderly parents when their own feelings are vicariously uttered with

all the innocence of childhood, in their little ones' recitation of it in village schools. It is both for its beauty and clarity, as well as for its simplicity of expression and the patheitc purity of the sentiments depicted, that this poem had been selected to be the first reading text in Orissa's village schools for centuries.

The charm of this poem lies really in its intimate domesticity as well as the homely diction. The simple words of sorrowing Yasoda strike sympathetic chords deep in our hearts:

Ah! Cuckoo, my Kesava left for Mathura,
But alas, whose sinister influence prevents my child from returning?
Oh Cuckoo, to whom shall I give milk and sugar any more?
For the one who is so fond of them has left me for ever;
Oh Cuckoo, my darling has left and does not return!
These forests of Brindabana look desolate!
And to Nanda, my husband, O Cuckoo, this home is home no longer,
For, where is the attraction of a home without Govinda?

But the eternal taunt of a woman's tongue for the man comes out nicely when Yosoda accuses her old husband in this unkind manner:

Nanda, Oh Cuckoo, turned his own heart to stone
And enthusiastically seated the boys in the chariot, after putting kajjal on their eyes!

But her sadness submerges all other feelings and acquires unspeakable intensity in the following words of despair and jealousy. In her irredeemable suffering, Yosoda indeed gains tragic magnificience as the typical sorrowing Mother:

I nourished him with the milk of these breasts, Oh Cuckoo,
But alas! now I am deprived of the very sight of that child, now in my old age;
Fortunate indeed, Oh Cuckoo, is that woman Devaki
For the child that was mine, in strange justice, is now hers!

A century and half later, Jagannatha Dasa, the celebrated author of the Oriya *Bhagavata* wrote *Artha koili*, giving an esoteric interpretaion of this charming poem. Although that was a fantastic attempt, yet it indicates the immense popularity that this poem had come to enjoy among the people of Orissa in so short a time.

Kalasa chautisa

As has been said before, *Kesava koili* combines in itself the twin patterns of old Oriya lyrics, the *koili* and also the *chautisa*, composed in the alphabetical order. But the *chautisa* proper that is recognised as the earliest is, however, the *Kalasa chautisa* of Bachha Dasa.

Like the *Madala Panji*, this book, *Kalasa chautisa* of Bachha Dasa, is also still a controverisal issue in Oriya. The only argument in favour of putting it in this period is that it is supposed to be referred to by Sarala Dasa in his *Mahabharata* about a century later. It is true that Sarala Dasa mentions reciting of *kalasa* in a ceremony. But the word 'kalasa' still remains mysteriously vague. There is nothing in this poem to justify its title of *kalasa*, and one still wonders what exactly Sarala Dasa referred to when he spoke of 'kalasa' being recited. The use in this *chautisa* of the pure Persian-Arabic word 'farman'—a royal command—makes its antiquity also very doubtful, for Orissa had to wait two centuries more to know the Mussalman as a ruler.

But we had better leave this controversy to the pundits and carry on the story of literature where dates and periods are not of primary importance. This *Kalasa chautisa* is a panegyric to Siva, though cleverly composed as a satire. It consists of 34 stanzas, written in the alphabetic order of a *chautisa*. It describes old decrepit Siva's marriage with the young and beautiful Uma, the daughter of King Himavanta of the Himalayas. When old Siva rides in as the bridegroom on a haggard bull, with a begging bowl in his hand, doubling up at times in tense asthmatic fits, Himavanta's queen refuses to hand over her darling daughter to such a wretched-looking son-in-law. Even young Uma displays signs of revolt against her father's wrong selection! But the old King asked both mother and daughter to have patience and forget the age

of Siva, the glory of the God of gods. In the end the marriage gets through and all are happy.

The diction of this *chautisa* is indeed archaic. That gives the piece the halo of supposed antiquity, but the performance is, on the whole, poor. It makes the faithful Uma's character very commonplace and petty, in making her join her mother in her revolt against the decision to marry Siva. This shows that the author had either an imperfect knowledge of our mythology or lacked the necessary sensitiveness to appreciate the better parts of our grand puranic creations, of whom Uma is one of the loveliest and the most sublime. The author could not maintain the satire till the end and the happy ending comes with abruptness, indeed with bathos.

Absolutely nothing also is known of this writer Bachha Dasa as a man.

The *koilis* and *chautisas* will be dealt with in their totality in Chapter VIII which covers the period of their full growth.

But these marriage-poems, the *koili*-poems of the tender emotions of lovers and of loving mothers, the stories of fasts and festivals, do really indicate the true natural beginnings of a national literature. They are significantly small. Dealing with the small joys and sorrows of the common man, they brought into existence the incipient streams of a voluminous national literature. They became popular with the people in spite of contempt from the ruling dynasties and the upper classes, and have survived all these centuries, because of their deep social associations. Taken together, these prose and poetry pieces, however humble and unpretentious, do indeed provide a field in which a great national poet might rise and flourish and are not an inadequate background for portrayals of epic dimensions.

And so comes the towering poetic talent that was Sarala Dasa and his really unusual literary adventures.

CHAPTER VII

ORIYA MAHABHARATA AND ITS SUDRA POET

Historical Background

The Bhaumakaras and the Kesari kings in northern Orissa, the Sailodbhavas in central and the Gangas in southern Orissa, laid the foundation of what may be called the Oriya culture in the period between the 6th and 14th centuries. The building activities that Kharavela had started in the 1st century B.C. were taken up by the Bhaumakaras, expanded and glorified by the short-lived Kesaries or Somas and finalised in splendid magnificence by the Gangas. These noble kings vied with one another in filling the land with shrines of breath-taking size, and with exquisite gossamer sculptural art that would make any nation justifiably proud. They were great patrons of learning and poetry too. But unfortunately, Sanskrit remaining the language of the elite all through this period, the speech of the people remained sadly neglected and an indigenous literature, unlike the indigenous art, had yet to be born.

The Gangas became builders and rulers of empires also as they were of colossal temples. It is they who not only unified northern, western and southern Orissa, but also extended her imperialist boundaries right from the Ganga down to the Godavari and ruled this vast, sprawling State with such excellent administrative efficiency that the main outlines of their revenue, military and religious government are visible in Orissa even today. The peculiar Oriya surnames such as Patnaikas, Mahapatras, Dalais, Dalabeheras and Nayakas, etc. all representing particular jobs and responsibilities under the State administration, originated out of the novel reforms the Gangas introduced in the State and society of Orissa.

After nearly three centuries of glorious rule the Ganga dynasty came to an end in A.D. 1415 when Kapilendra Deva ushered in the still more glorious reigns of the Solar dynasty.

It was in the reign of one of the earlier Ganga kings that

Northern India was overrun by the first Muhammedan invaders. Subsequently, the Moslem conquerors of Bengal tried again and again to occupy Orissa, but were not only beaten off but also pursued right up to their own capitals more than once. This sturdy political freedom and military glory were retained by the Oriyas for about three centuries after the whole of North India had become Moslem territory. The Solar Rajas, besides facing the Moslem invaders from the North like their predecessors the Gangas, now had to give equally glorious battle to the Moslem armies of the recently founded Muhammedan powers of the Bahamani kingdom in the south whose territories touched, in those days, the southern and western boundaries of Orissa.

Sarala Dasa, the poet of the Oriya *Mahabharata* flourished in the reign of the founder and the greatest ruler of the Solar dynasty, Sri Kapilendra Deva, who is a legendary figure in Orissa. This king rose from the ranks and wrested the throne of Orissa from the last Ganga king whose Commander-in-Chief he had become, through sheer mental brilliance and physical vigour. This commoner-king carried the Oriya arms down to the banks of the Kaveri and to Warrangal and beyond, into the very heart of the South Indian Moslem powers of those days.

Thus, the State of Orissa enjoyed enviable political freedom and military prestige for centuries in the midst of a sub-continent overrun and ruled by foreigners. It was bejewelled with magnificent structures, reflecting the high degree of civilisation to which the people had risen. It was certainly prosperous. The sculptural panorama of the temple walls at Bhubaneswar and Konarak which were built in those spacious times reveal a people with a terrific zest for life, fighting, hunting, making love, catching elephants, marching on conquests as well as listening to the wise men and offering devotion to the Deity. The people were proud of themselves, of their king and their State and dreamed of lovely women.

Sarala Dasa was born in such political conditions and in such propitious times. True national poet that he is, we find all these happy contemporary conditions clearly reflected in the vigorous narrative of his great *Mahabharata*.

His precursors in Oriya prose and poetry, as described in

the previous Chapter, small though their achievements, had prepared the ground for him. They flourished under the Sanskrit loving Gangas and their literary ventures look like hesitant attempts at an as yet unaccomplished task. But the popularity of little things like the *Kesava Koili* and *Kalasa Chautisa* must have put into the heart of the semi-educated peasant that Sarala Dasa really was, or as he declares himself often to be, the necessary courage for the unprecedented endeavour of writing epics in a neglected tongue. The *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa in Oriya is a unique literary achievement for a peasant. But then the peasant was a genius and he was born in epic times. So the Oriya *Mahabharata* appears to be not an unexpected fruit of the happy combination of the times and the man.

Apart from the historical background against which we now imagine Sarala Dasa to have written his *Mahabharata* and other works, on the internal evidence of his own creations also, the great poet emerges as the first historic man of letters in Oriya literature. Unlike the mysterious, vague, spectral personalities of all his predecessors, and most of his successors until we reach recent times, of whom we are without any conclusive information as to their birth, age, parentage or location, in Sarala Dasa we come across, for the first time, a literary figure who very definitely lived the life of a common man, had a family and a vocation, and who in his writings makes direct as well as thinly veiled references to contemporary historical personalities and events. The villages, the rivers, the deities he talks about are still there, little changed through these six centuries.

Legends and Realities of His Life

Legend, corroborated by the poet's own assertions in his works, has established that Sarala Dasa was born in the village of Jhankada in the present District of Cuttack. His descendants are still there, scattered in the villages round about. He was a devoted worshipper of the goddess Sarala whose temple still stands in the village of Kanakapura, about a mile from his native village. Not far from this village the poet's *samadhi* still stands under a spreading banyan tree, an object of devotion and respect to people all around.

True genius that he was, Sarala Dasa appears to be the very incarnation of humility. He never talks of himself as a writer without ascribing all that he is to the grace of the goddess Sarala. Here is one of his frequent professions:

'It is through the grace of the goddess Sarala that I have been able to make the invisible visible. I make no claim to the authorship of these lines, as I write only what she dictates to me. Ignorant from birth, never having been to a school, far from being a celebrity, and not versed in *japas* or *mantras*, I write out merely that which comes to my mind, through Her grace, sitting under this green banyan tree.'—Drona Parva

The poet was perhaps a little better off than most. His elder brother, Parasurama, was the ferry-keeper at a nearby village past which flowed the river Chandrabhaga. Most probably he was indebted to his elder brother for looking after the family, leaving the unworldly poet in peace with his palm-leaf scribbling and story-telling. Otherwise he would not have mentioned this elder brother again and again in his *Mahabharata* whereas he is practically silent about his parents.

A Sudra Saint

The poet, without any rancour and with profound humility, unashamedly speaks of himself as an ignorant 'Sudra'. In popular consciousness, therefore, the poet lives as 'Sudra-muni' the Sudra Saint. But it was a blessing to the nation and to Oriya literature that this great genius was born a peasant living close to Orissa's soil, absorbing into and displaying in his life the very essence of the national culture in all its aspects. It was indeed good also, that he grew up, it seems, completely ignorant of Sanskrit and was not highly educated in any sense. All these apparent deficiencies have brought to his creations that strong individuality, that vital indigenous colour and that smell of the common personality of Orissa, that would have been impossible otherwise.

The legend that the poet in his young days received the direct command of the goddess Sarala to write the story of the *Mahabharata* in Oriya, while he was actually ploughing his

ancestral acres, is perhaps a metaphorical description of the simple fact that the peasant poet got the first urge to independent composition while he tilled the soil, an operation that naturally invites music and poetry to ease the tedium of going the monotonous round of the furrows. Perhaps the poet's younger days were divided between paddy fields and the village *akhada* in preparation for the military campaigns of the then independent Orissa kings. The tillers of the soil supplied the largest number of recruits for these. And his evenings were spent perhaps in listening to stories of the epics and puranas, told by the local Brahmin priests. From the over-powering zest with which Sarala Dasa describes battles, duels, military campaigns and wars, one is convinced that he personally participated in the many historic military campaigns of the contemporary Kapilendra Deva in Southern India. Places like Oda-Sivapura on the river Godavari that he directly mentions are still there, and veiled but transparent references are made in his epic, as has been proved by Dr. K. C. Panigrahi, to the historic forts of Kondavidu and Devarkonda, as well as the Bahamani and Vijayanagara kingdoms, at least parts of which king Kapilendra Deva either subdued by regular conquest or ravaged.

With all these practical experiences, though without much of formal education, and with the innate insight of a poetic genius into the heart of men and matters, Sarala Dasa has painted real life which he saw, men and women of real flesh and blood, and not demi-gods and angels such as are found in the Sanskrit epics. His world is the world of a rural peasant. The broad feet of his heroes are dirty with the common dust of the path of life; the dainty hands of his beautiful heroines are soiled with kitchen soot and roughened with daily chores. Sarala's royal heroines, irrespective of their social status, are made hilariously realistic also through the natural petty jealousies which are inseparable from feminine nature. Here are just two illustrations of the poetic metamorphosis.

Ganga and Draupadi in Sarala Mahabharata

Ganga, for instance, is not the beauteous, aristocratic, and divine romantic wife of Santanu that she is in the original

Mahabharata. She is here an impetuous, imperious, and tyrannical shrew. Not having any access to the original in Sanskrit, the poet perhaps imagined Ganga's character in consonance with the spirit of the river which she personified—a most natural conception, though a little undignified in the eyes of the average Indian who looks upon Ganga as hallowed with sanctity. On the other hand, Ganga is a psychological absurdity in the original work, killing her children as soon as born in spite of a romantic marriage. In Sarala's work her behaviour acquires psychological plausibility because hers is an arranged marriage, much against her own inclinations and she frankly tells her royal husband that she is in no mood to love him, that she agreed to be his wife only to honour her father's pledge. In a book describing earthly life, men and women must be and should be of the earth, earthy, like this Ganga of Sarala's creation. The departure, therefore, of Sarala Dasa, the rustic genius, from the olympic level of the Sanskrit epic to the lowly level of village homes and paddy fields, is quite admirable and surprising. Such daring is possible only with men of genius.

With all his peasant upbringing in an interior rural area, far from aristocracy and royal courts, this poet had also an amazingly acute and innate sensibility to beauty earthly and divine, with an unusual insight into human character in circles far above his station. Draupadi, the heroine of the epic, may serve as another example.

Young Draupadi is brought in a covered litter before the vast assembly of India's princes and kings. They are gathered at Panchala to compete for her far-famed beauty. The royal assembly was tumultuously noisy. Said Jarasandha to Dhristadyumna, Draupadi's brother—'Nobody dare speak his heart to you. You have concealed your sister inside a litter. Let her be brought into this assembly of kings and let everybody see her face. That is the only way to pacify this vast crowd.' On hearing these words, King Drupada ordered his daughter to be brought down into the presence of the kings. Stepping between two ladies-in-waiting, Kesini and Jayaseni, Draupadi appears and the kings see her for the first time. Some of them lost their composure at the very first glimpse of her body, her face and her beauty. Gaṇapati,

the king of Nirjhara Desa, poured out his feelings in the following manner: 'Glorious indeed is the family of this king Drupada for having been blessed with such a daughter. How lovely are her curly locks which attract bees by their sweet flowery fragrance. Thank God, she looks bashfully at the ground, for she would certainly cause many deaths in this assembly if she looked full at us but once....'

The king of Damana asked, 'Why has she not any jewellery on her person?'

Replied Duryodhana, 'Are you crazy not to understand that? It would be too great a burden for that delicate beauty.'

'Why should she,' joined in Karna, 'wear gold and jewels at all? Her body is a hundred times more precious than any gold.'

Soon this phantasm of beauty, won by Arjuna in the archery-contest, is taken to the desolate potter's workshop where the Pandavas, in the disguise of mendicant Brahmins, are living with their old mother Kunti. There, the loveliest princess on earth was asked by her old mother-in-law to sleep on charcoal and ashes as her own sons were doing. Draupadi would not have been human if she had not minded this sudden change from the luxury of a palace to a bed of ashes in a deserted potter's work-shed. And like a natural woman of flesh and blood she bewailed her lot.

Said Kunti, 'My sons live by begging. You have married them according to your fate. This is the law of Karma. Good and bad fortune is the order of this world. It comes to everybody.' Poor Draupadi, looking at the bed of ashes, said to herself in deep sorrow, 'Oh Fate, did you have this in store for me? I slept on downy quilts spread on bejewelled beds, waited upon by hundreds of maids. They covered my bed with soft coloured silk and sprinkled camphor-powder over it. Accustomed to sleep like that, am I to sleep on this bed of ashes?'

Observing her hesitation, Bhima stared rudely at her and asked, 'Why don't you go to sleep, girl? What is the matter with you?' Poor little Draupadi was terrified lest the stout, rough Brahmin kill her outright. And she immediately feigned sleep, lying at the feet of the five brothers and sighing deeply

over her fate. She, born a king's daughter, had married mendicant Brahmins!

This realistic picture is just not there in the original.

We see this frail, ethereal beauty, as yet unschooled in life's experiences, changed into a spirited, tempestuous, and righteously indignant woman at the court of Duryodhana when she boldly mocks the manliness of each of her five husbands because they cannot protect her from the insults of the Kaurava brothers.

We see her next sitting in regal majesty by the side of her imperial husband, Yudhishthira, at the Rajasuya ceremony. But in comes Ghatotkacha, Bhima's son by Hidimbika, the forest woman, a co-wife of Draupadi. In Sarala Das's lifelike portraiture, the feminine in Draupadi springs up, breaking through the thin veneer of queenly majesty as soon as she sees her step-son. As tutored before by his own jealous mother Hidimbika, Ghototkacha does not make his obeisance to Draupadi before the dignitaries present at the Rajasuya ceremony. Thus infuriated, Her imperial majesty questions Ghatotkacha's breeding and manners and curses him with an early death. Thereupon Hidimbika, who was waiting outside and eavesdropping on what was passing in the assembly, enters like a fury, and the two co-wives start a realistic, natural, womanly quarrel, without caring for the dignity of the place and occasion. The forest woman cries, 'Have you cursed my child, being yourself a mother? What indeed are you? How do you deserve to be respected as a woman, you who have no less than five husbands? And my son, though young, is already anointed king in his own territory. Why should he make obeisance to you? You are childless and a childless woman is inauspicious. You know that very well indeed. And if and when you have children, I curse you in return, they will all die at the age of seven each.'

This too does not occur in the original.

The Story of True Mango

In the Bana Parva, Sarala Dasa introduces the interesting 'True Mango' story. The Pandavas were in exile for twelve years, wandering from forest to forest, and country to country. At one time it was suspected at the court of Duryodhana

that they were perhaps dead in the jungle. To ascertain the truth, a Brahmin was despatched to scout and was instructed how to distinguish the Pandavas from other people, by asking for something impossible, as for instance a ripe mango in the autumn season. The Pandavas were known never to refuse the request of a Brahmin or a holy man and they would certainly fulfil this request also and that would reveal their identity.

Accordingly, this man went out to search in the wilderness and met a group of persons in a distant forest. Suspecting them to be the Pandavas, he pretended to be hungry and expressed his desire for a ripe mango, which was completely out of season at that time. The Pandavas (they were no other) were in a quandary. Afraid of a holy man's curse, they meditated in order to obtain Krishna's help and He came to their rescue. He told them to plant a mango stone. As soon as the plant came up, he asked each to make a clear confession of his or her failings. That power of Truth, said Krishna, would produce the mango fruit even though it was not the season.

The Pandavas made confessions one by one. Space does not allow the whole story to be told. But when it came to Draupadi she admitted before Krishna, and all her five husbands, that in spite of them, she often felt a desire for the handsome and heroic Karna.[1]

Such is the way this great rustic poet of Orissa has handled the epic heroes and heroines in his own deeply realistic, flesh and blood manner, with his keen peasant eyes fixed on life close to the earth he lived on, caring little for romantic idealism or philosophical ethics.

But does Draupadi's confession before the 'True Mango' plant or her co-wifely quarrel with Hidimbika or her bewailing of her fate on her first nuptial night in the potter's workshed, make her any the less great in our eyes? These are variant facets to this diamond of a woman. They bespeak the great creative powers, unusual daring and deep insight into human nature of our peasant poet. Devout as

[1] This True Mango story has got, *mutatis mutandis*, into the Bengali *Mahabharata* of Kasiram Das, who came two hundred years later and indicates the deep influence that Sarala's epic exercised over neighbouring languages. In the counterpart of this episode in the original epic, the irate sage Durvasa is sent by Duryodhana, but the sage's anger is forestalled by Krishna, producing the *akshaya-patra* which satisfies all demands of food.

he was, he would not commit sacrilege in a light-hearted spirit. He was writing the entire epic in the pervasive presence of a goddess. It must have been only the crazy dictates of his peasant genius that forced his pen to mould the epic characters in this homely way, making them walk the muddy earth, descending from olympic pedestals. And the great Sudra must be saluted for doing this.

Sarala Dasa is the one man in the whole of old Oriya literature to whom literature was life, and not philosophy or ethics or religion. He had no pretensions to any sort of idealistic preaching. He is out to tell only stories of men and women like ourselves, but a little magnified to make them interesting in the common eyes. He has scrupulously deleted from his *Mahabharata* all the philosophical discussions in the original. The Gita he has dashed off in a few lines, a very, very much more natural thing than the situation in the original epic where two armies are kept waiting, facing each other, till all the 18 chapters of a philosophical treatise have been recited. Sarala Dasa had no pretensions to wisdom or learning. He has again and again admitted his humble birth, lack of education, even lack of intelligence. But all unconscious of himself, he was a great literary craftsman.

The Original made topsy-turvy in Sarala Mahabharata

Sarala Dasa has not only changed the original epic characters in his own peasant way, he has played havoc even with the very order of the 18 books of the original epic. Sarala Dasa had only a vague knowledge of the division of the books of the original epic and of its main story. Keeping the starting and the final points as in the original, to give his book the necessary semblance, the poet felt free to write out the epic in his own way. In his book, while one misses many of the excellent stories and incidents of the Sanskrit *Mahabharata*, one also gets refreshingly pleasant surprises when one comes across new stories, situations and characters, all highly interesting and indicating the intensely practical, common-sense attitude to life that it is natural to expect in a peasant writer, out to write deliberately for the common rural folk only. Here for example is the interesting episode in the advent of Kali Yuga that is not in the original:

While the good King Yudhishthira was getting ready to leave the world, a Brahmin in a village asked his Sudra servant to uproot a tree on a mound in his fields and level the mound with the adjacent cultivated land. The servant set to work and while digging the mound discovered a pair of jewelled gold bangles underneath the tree. He brought them to his master saying that the bangles, being found in his fields, were his (master's). Perhaps they were hidden there by some of his ancesters. But the Brahmin said that he was entitled only to harvest the crops of the land and the bangles were the servant's as he had found them as a result of his own hard labour. The servant said that he was entitled only to his daily wages and nothing else and he would commit great sin by appropriating the bangles which were rightfully his master's. Failing to come to any decision by themselves they came before Yudhishthira for a verdict. The good king, listening to their pious dispute, was both pleased and amazed and unable to decide either way. He turned to brother Sahadeva, the wise man of the family.

Thereupon Sahadeva revealed that this incident was possible because Satyayuga still prevailed on the earth, beyond its time, as on the advice of Sri Krishna he had tied Kali in a secret place where he was to remain till the last day of Yudhishthira's reign on earth. Kali (discord) had descended into the world on the very day Krishna went to Duryodhana's court as the emissary of the Pandavas and was refused his simple, well-meant request. But both Krishna and Sahadeva had seen Kali's descent. Krishna asked Sahadeva to catch and bind him to a post till the end of Yudhishthira's reign. But now that the great King Yudhishthira had already anointed Parikshita as his successor and was about to depart, he was going to release Kali.

Accordingly Kali was set free and the dispute between the Brahmin master and his Sudra servant immediately changed its character. The Brahmin claimed the bangles to be his as they were found in his fields. And the servant declared that the latter had title only to the harvests on the surface of his land, and not to what was underneath. He, the servant, was entitled to the fruit of his own labour.

Parikshita, the king of Kaliyuga, heard their claims and

counter-claims. He declared that the bangles belonged neither to the master nor to his servant, but to the state and ordered the precious bangles to be taken at once to the royal treasury.

Most likely the poet saw and knew many instances of rough justice in his times and his instinctive revolt against such social and political conditions has been expressed in the guise of this charming, metaphorical tale.

Shadows of Social Conflicts

That Sarala Dasa mostly depended upon and turned to good use, in his epic, his own day-to-day experiences as well as contemporary political and historical happenings, is seen through the many similar episodes and stories he describes. The strange battle between Brahmins and Chandals he has introduced in the Adi Parva appears to be highly intriguing, from the sociological, historical and ethnological points of view. It either symbolises the eternal Brahmin versus non-Brahmin conflict in India, or the Aryan invasion of the south, or some actual isolated happening not long before the time of the poet, such as the founding of a Brahmin dynasty in Orissa. It is difficult to say with any certainty what exactly it means. The story runs like this.

During their wanderings all over India, incognito, the Pandavas came to the town of Odadi-Sivapura, a town which still stands on the Godavari as a place of pilgrimage. There the Pandavas with their mother Kunti took shelter in the house of Bishnukara Panda, a typical Oriya Brahmin name. After some time Yudhishthira wanted to visit Gautami *tirtha*, as an auspicious day for a holy bath there was coming soon. Old Kunti was left in the care of Bishnukara Panda and his wife. She reasonably suggested that Yudhishthira leave Bhima behind, as he was likely to create trouble if he chanced to see Duryodhana and his brothers also there. Accordingly Bhima was left behind.

One day Bhima found the sleepy town of Odadi-Sivapura suddenly awake with activity. There were preparations for war. The citizens were shouting and getting ready for the oncoming battle. Bhima asked Bishnukara Panda the reason.

Bishnukar said: 'In bye-gone days there was a pious Brahmin

at Sivapura. He had two sons by his legally wedded Brahmin wife. Then he went on pilgrimage to the river Baitarani. As he was travelling alone close to a mountain named Budhakuta, an aggressive Chandala girl saw him and enticed the handsome Brahmin youth away with her. She kept him with her for ten years under a sort of hypnotic influence, and bore him ten sons. The Chandala and the Brahmin brothers have been fighting each another ever since. The Chandalas come from Udra Desa (Orissa). They are savage and barbaric. They loot property and kidnap pretty Brahmin girls. They regularly invade Sivapura once a year in the month of Sravana to get their usual booty. And this is the time. The war preparations are to meet them.'

The Chandalas came and made havoc. Bhima was waiting and watching along with his host, the timid-hearted Brahmin Bishnukara Panda, who was restrained with difficulty from taking to flight by his guest. And then he plunged into the fray with an uprooted tree in his hand, and put the Chandalas to rout.

Then the citizens of Sivapura assembled and made Bhima their king, as there was no king there. Bhima made Bishnukara Panda his minister and during the absence of the other brothers, brought his kingdom to a large size through conquests of the neighbouring territories. When the Pandavas ultimately left, Bishnukara Panda was made king of the newly-founded kingdom. He later on attended the court of Yudhishthira at the Rajasuya ceremony as one of India's respectable southern potentates.

The Poet's deep Sympathy for the Lowly and the Outcast

It is so significant that Sarala Dasa, in spite of the orthodox piety of a common low-caste Hindu householder, reveals strangely broad sympathies for the lowly and the outcast. He has created golden characters out of the contemptible of the land. The Savara Jara, in his epic, stands as a grand symbol of non-Aryan personality. It is Jara who, being refused by the Brahmin Drona the chance of military education because of his non-Aryan birth, turns into the famous Ekalavya; it is Jara again who kills Krishna, it is Jara who follows the unburnt heart of Krishna as it is washed by the

waves of the sea along India's long sea-board. He rescues it at last at Puri on the east coast. According to a highly ingenious interpretation first popularised by Sarala Dasa, if not started by him, it is the unburnt heart of Sree Krishna that has metamorphosed itself into the present day Jagannatha in order to serve humanity during Kaliyuga. This legend is and has been believed by millions in Orissa, all these centuries, without knowing who first gave it wide currency. This is the story.

When King Indradyumna of Malava sent the Brahmin Viswavasu in search of Vishnu, the latter discovered Him in the Blue-mountain at Puri, jealously guarded by the Savara, Jara. After many vicissitudes Vishnu condescended to reside in the great temple that King Indradyumna had built for His earthly residence. He told the King in a dream that the image in which he would display Himself in the temple would be revealed in the Rohini-kunda next day. And the image was there, at the bottom of the water in the cistern, in all its effulgence. Then the King wanted to lift it out of water. But, lo and behold, it was found so heavy that the King and even his entire retinue failed to move it. At last the King spent a night of vigil praying to God, who told him that *He could be raised only if Jara (the Adivasi) would hold Him on one side and Visvavasu (the Brahmin) on the other.* This was accordingly done and the image moved easily. This speaks volumes indeed for the unique intuitive vision and the extraordinary mental breadth of this peasant poet who, as long ago as the 14th-15th century, rose above all the petty social and religious inhibitions, and so categorically declared through the mouth of God Himself that India's spiritual efflorescence lay in a total and integral fusion of the Aryan and non-Aryan cultures, shaking off all distinctions of caste or colour.

This story in Sarala's *Mahabharata* was elaborated, as we shall see later on (Chapter VIII), in ballads and *yatras* that have had the widest currency among the common people in Orissa.[1]

[1] This story has also been taken up by Gadadhar, the younger brother of Kasiram Das, the author of Bengali *Mahabharata* for his *Jagannatha Mangala Kavya,* which, linguistically, is full of adapted Oriya idioms.

Jain and Buddhist Influences in Sarala's Epic

The *Mahabharata*, as we all know, is a war poem. The entire epic is war all through, ending in the tragic devastation of war exactly as we have experienced in our own times. Sarala Dasa, influenced perhaps as much by the military traditions of his own caste as by the subject itself, describes battles and duels with a gusto that is not to be found in any other topic he handles. But in and through these wars and preparations for war, the images and voices of peace and non-violence keep emerging through his pages in sublimating contrast to the violent surroundings, just like Gandhiji in modern times. This is most probably the result of the deep impress that both Jainism and Buddhism left in the national consciousness of the Oriyas. This influence must have been much more fresh in the poet's time than now. The Buddhist psalms and songs were not so remote. Hence the ideal of non-violence, of peace, of universal compassion and of non-enmity, comes up again and again in the *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa, with a strange beauty of its own. In the Sabha Parva, for instance, he describes a veritable Ahimsa-colony somewhere in Sindh. The Raja or the leader there had carved the kingdom out of the sea by setting up dykes. It was quite extensive. But the Raja had no quarrel with his neighbours, nor had he any territorial ambitions. He and his subjects had complete faith not only in non-violence, but even in non-possession. The Raja himself begged his food every day like a Jaina mendicant, with a bell tied to his thigh. To do good to others was the mission of his royal existence. This is indeed the Gramadana and Bhoodana and Jivandana movement of Vinobhaji. anticipated by six centuries.[1]

Popularity of Sarala's 'Mahabharata' in Orissa

In spite of many unique and excellent qualities, however, this epic of Sarala Dasa has, owing to his lack of any formal education and systematic training and comprehensive

[1] I entirely agree with the suggestion of Sri Gopinatha Mahanty, the celebrated Oriya novelist, that the poet painted this idealistic Ahimsa state, perhaps from the tradition of the last cloistered days of Kharavela and his first queen, who became Jain mendicants. The historical proof of this is the double-storyed cave named 'Rani Hamsapur', or the Home of Queen Hamsa still existing in Udayagiri near Bhubaneswara.

erudition, the appearance of a wild growth. It has the wildness of unschooled genius, and in it we miss the elegance of trained scholarship. But this book is popular with the people just for these very reasons. In Oriya there are now three authentic verse translations, and one authentic prose translation of the original *Mahabharata*. But the people care little for pedantic accuracy. They hunger for life's realities and sensations, as well as for heroic and aesthetic dreamlands, where their own little selves stand magnified a thousandfold. All these the reader gets in plenty in the grand wilderness of Sarala's Oriya *Mahabharata*. Combined with his strong common-sense view of life, typical of a peasant, we find in Sarala a facile proneness to exaggeration and hyperbole, which is another typical characteristic of the country folk. He never talks of an army except in terms of millions and billions. Even Hidimbika, the forest-concubine of Bhima, brings as presents, while coming with her son Ghatotkacha, to attend the Rajasuya ceremony of Yudhishthira, one hundred cart-loads of *kasturi* (musk), one lakh loads of fragrant *amla*, another lakh loads of sandalwood and camphor, and several lakh loads of mangoes. These exaggerations give vivacity to all his narrations of episodes and incidents and are most enjoyable to the common peasant folk.

A National Epic

If epics are and have to be national in character, the *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa is a national epic from many standpoints. It had to be a book of Orissa and the Oriyas, in the very nature of things, as the poet knew no other language except Oriya, and knew no other world or society except that of his own rural environment. But as in many other things Sarala Dasa was dynamic in his patriotism also. His epic is a picture gallery of Oriya social life that is true even today. To make his motherland Orissa loom large and important in the eyes of his compatriots with the holy halo of puranic sanctity, he not only linked Sri Krishna's death in Saurashtra to the rise of Jagannatha at Puri, but he brought the Pandavas to visit all the holy places of Orissa and made them live like common Oriya citizens like Bishnukara Panda, and Ananta Pratihari mentioned in his epic. He even made old

Yudhishthira marry an inauspicious Oriya girl, the daughter of Hari Shahoo, an oilman, in consonance with that good king's reputation for helping everybody in distress. He made all the Pandavas live on Orissa's soil for 75 years.

Sarala Dasa has carefully omitted, as has been said earlier, intellectual and philosophic discussion from his epic. He believed peasant-fashion in action and example. He had the intuition also that dry-as-dust theological, ethical or metaphysical debate would make his epic unnecessarily dull to his simple rural readers and listeners. But all the same, scattered throughout his epic there is excellent advice for the common man on vital aspects of life, charged with the deep common sense of an intelligent peasant. Here are some typical pieces of advice given by Bhisma to Yudhishthira in Santi Parva.

'Oh King, distribute charity to the subjects at proper times and on appropriate occasions. Don't believe things without personal surprise visits. Don't give up hunting altogether and respect the gods and Brahmins. See that the devout in the land observe *ekadasi* and do not permit foreign emissaries to live in the capital. Never covet another's wife or wealth; be satisfied with your legally wedded wives. Entrust your administration only to very trustworthy ministers, and even then don't relinquish to them all your powers. Distribute free food and drink at all places of pilgrimage and place commanders of the army at places where they are needed. Be liberal in the maintenance of war elephants and horses, and leave plenty of pasture land for cattle. You should have an eye for talent and honour it; never be miserly towards poets.'

This last piece of advice, so out of place here in the ordinary manner, put into the mouth of a dying soldier, and spoken to a future king for the good of his administration, seems to have been deliberately included by our peasant poet, either as a vindication of his own literary profession, eternally neglected by the state and looked down upon by the pedant and the mediocre, or as a humble testament to the personal neglect or contumely that he himself suffered, and from which he magnanimously wished to protect brother poets in future.

Influence of Sarala's Epic on the National Life and Literature

The Oriya *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa was written two centuries before the *Mahabharata* came into existence in the sister language, Bengali. The *Mahabharata* in Telugu was written by three successive court poets and was completed in the 18th century. Perhaps in no other modern Indian language was a *Mahabharata* produced so early and by such a poet as Sarala Dasa—a semi-educated Sudra. And no other vernacular *Mahabharata* has perhaps the same hold on the common people as the Oriya *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa. Stories, characters, episodes, and lines from Sarala's *Mahabharata* have gone deep into the national life of the Oriyas. If a happening becomes spectacular, growing out of a small affair, an Oriya peasant invariably says, 'This is indeed a *Mahabharata* growing out of a game of Jhimiti (Hadodo).' According to Sarala Dasa, the unquenchable animosity between the Pandavas and the Kauravas started from a friendly game of Hadodo. Any pious hypocrite in Orissa is described as 'the tiger in the Tulsi-forest' or 'the stork with the cotton wool in its beak', both characters from fables in Sarala's *Mahabharata*. In the eyes of the people of Orissa this epic has assumed the sanctity and the sanctifying power of a scripture. Many an Oriya peasant ceremonially starts its recital in order to bring about the birth of a son.

The popularity of this *Mahabharata* caused it to be translated into old Bengali and it is heard from authoritative sources that the *Mahabharata* story as found in the Indonesian islands is closest, of all the versions in India, to that of Sarala Dasa. But this has yet to be verified.

Sarala Dasa, the peasant-genius, not only wrote a great book, but practically created a whole literature. The whole subsequent development of Oriya literature was possible just because this peasant left behind this grand composition in a language that was still contemptible in the eyes of the learned and the rulers. This Sudra's successful adventure supplied inspiration and encouragement to all his immediate successors. And its influence on poets down to modern times is also deep and expansive. Many a poet, including the western-educated Radhanatha and Madhusudana of modern times, have borrowed episodes from Sarala's storehouse for their own

literary creations. This has happened in all the periods of Oriya literature.

Other Works of Sarala Dasa

It seems this little peasant was burdened with a restless energy that impelled him to go from one literary adventure to another. The immense epic of the *Mahabharata* was not enough for him. At one point in it he narrates the entire *Ramayana* story, a great literary need at that time as the Oriya *Ramayana* had to wait a century more to get written. But the goody-goody story of the Rama and Sita of Valmiki's creation must have appeared too tame for the vigorous mind of the soldier-peasant. So he wrote the *Vilanka Ramayana* in contrast to the Lanka *Ramayana* of Valmiki.

This *Vilanka Ramayana* is now traced to the *Adbhuta Ramayana* in Sanskrit. But the poet, because of his ignorance of Sanskrit, could not have had any direct access to it. He must have only heard the vague outlines of the story of the *Adbhuta Ramayana* from Brahmins, as he had heard the main stories of the *Mahabharata* also. But these vague hints were enough to fire the peasant-poet's imagination because of psychological affinities, for the story of the *Adbhuta Ramayana* contains the seeds of extra ordinary situations calling for vigorous and unusual dramatic action.

The story of the *Vilanka Ramayana* of Sarala Dasa is like this. When the news of the death of the ten-headed king of Lanka at the hands of Rama reached the ears of his friend, the hundred headed Ravana, king of the land of Vilanka, the latter grew furious. He wanted to avenge the death and defeat of his friend. Rama by that time had gone back to Ayodhya and was living happily with Sita. When they heard of the emergence of this new menace to the peace of the world, first Satrughna, then Lakshmana and lastly Bharata were sent to meet the foe. But they were all killed by the hundred-headed Ravana. Even the great Hanumana was blown off to a place thousands of miles away. At last Rama himself came into the battlefield. But he too failed to hold his own against the formidable Rakshasa adversary. Then Sita came to assist her husband. Observing the situation she took the entire burden of meeting the demon in battle upon her own delicate shoulders.

Appearing as the Eternal Feminine, she completely hypnotised and enervated the crude male energy of the demon. The symbolic killing was then done by Rama.

And this led to an intriguing joke between the great husband, Rama and his greater wife, Sita, as to 'who killed the Ravana of Lanka?'

Sarala Dasa wrote also the first *Chandipurana* in Oriya, a story which relates again how the Feminine subdues the crudely vigorous Masculine.

These two books taken together with his *Mahabharata*, give a glowing picture of the peasant author's mental constitution. This great unschooled peasant had an intuitive conviction, it seems, that the quietly pervasive qualities of the Feminine are far superior to the flamboyant, demonstrative activities of the crude Masculine. His Chandi and Sita and Draupadi combine in themselves supreme material achievements with supreme feminine charms. They dwarf the men characters by their resilient vitality and by the original way they think and act as well as by their irresistible beauty.

Sarala Dasa was thus not only a great poet, but the most modern of all the poets in old Oriya literature. He may be unique in the whole of Indian vernacular literature from this standpoint. The semi-educated peasant poet deserves indeed the salutations of all discerning critics.

CHAPTER VIII

THE POST-SARALA PERIOD—A PERIOD OF EXPERIMENTS

IN the hundred years between Sarala Dasa, whose genius was basically worldly and secular, and the group of other Dasas who laid the foundation of the people's religious life in Orissa, we come across only minor talents. But in their writings the beginnings of all the major streams of the literature of the subsequent periods are clearly visible.

The three great influences behind the creative output of these minor celebrities, as we now find on analysis, are: (i) the Buddhistic traditions in the land and the Buddhist psalms and lyrics already discussed; (ii) Jayadeva and his *Gitagovinda*; and (iii) Sarala Dasa himself. Let us consider them one by one.

I. THE BUDDHIST INFLUENCE

The Metaphysical Poets

There is an enormous amount of metaphysical writing in Oriya which started its mass approach in this transitional period. The *Sunya Samhita* of Virasimha, a Tamil, and the *Nirguna Mahatmya* and the *Vishnugarva Purana* of Chaitanya Dasa, written in this period, are still living books to the people of Orissa after some six centuries. But though many Oriya literary critics have taken great pains over books such as these, giving an impression to the average Oriya reader with a limited range of knowledge that they constitute great literature, no votary of genuine poetry would willingly concede the place meant for literature proper to these esoteric rigmaroles. We shall find later on that the entire next century in Orissa produceed nothing other than heaps of such metaphysical confusion. I say 'confusion' because, in spite of patient effort, I have not been able to discover any coherent, logical or inspiring philosophy anywhere in this vast wilderness of pretentious speculation and fancy. Almost every one of these

writers suggests to his imagined readers that he wrote the book on the command of no less a personality than God Himself, and that whosoever listens to the words of his book, not to speak of reading it, will go straight to Heaven. And the whole lot were so short-sighted and illogical that, while setting out to propagate the glories of *Sunya* (The great Void) or *Alekha* (The Formless One), they identified him, in the same breath, with the wooden image of Jagannatha at Puri.

But there is a historical explanation for all these confused religious theories in Orissa that accumulated in this and the next period of Oriya literature. Strangely enough, though medieval Oriya writers were completely ignorant of the evolutionary process, it is from their writings that we get a clear picture of it. The rise of Jagannatha from the holy blue-stone of the Savara tribe to the status of Vishnu, the most popular God of the Hindu Pantheon, was described in the last chapter. But the emergence of the strange Trinity of two brothers and a sister out of one Godhead that is Jagannatha to-day, demanding undivided worship from votaries, calls for further explanation.

This Trinity is unique in the whole Hindu Church. And strangely enough, within the precincts of this most famous Hindu shrine, i.e. of Jagannatha, the castes, so integral an element of Hindu Dharma, disappear completely. What is behind all this?

It is now admitted beyond any controversy that the three images (the two brothers Krishna and Balarama with their sister Subhadra between them) are nothing but the Brahminic metamorphosis of the three Gems of Buddhism: Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. The shrine of Jagannatha was most probably, as scholars generally believe, once a popular Buddhist monastery and a centre of Buddhist culture, particularly of the Mahayana brand. Every twelfth year, Jagannatha is made to assume a new body, discarding the old image. A tightly blind-folded Brahmin is made to take out, at this change-over, some mysterious substance thickly-padded in silk, from the hollow of the stomach of the old idol and put it into that of the new one. Many think, with good reason, that this mysterious thing may, after all, be nothing else than an ancient Buddhist relic. The images of Jagannatha and His

brother and sister are also far from anthropomorphic, as Hindu relgious images, such as those of Rama, Krishna, Saraswati, etc. generally are. They are, in a manner, 'formless', —a fact that made it possible for Oriya religious writers to identify even the *Sunya* and the *Alekha* (the Void or the Formless) with the image of Jagannatha. The images are nothing but stumps of wood with crude symbolic paintings for eyes and noses and small stumpy obtrusions for hands and feet. Dr. H. K. Mahatab in his *History of Orissa* (Oriya edition) has convincingly exposed these as the wooden transformation of the Pali letters that signify the Buddhist Triratna or the Three Gems of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. The *Saddharma Chakra* of the Buddhists has later on been added as the *Sudarsana Chakra* of Vishnu, a minor fourth image, besides the three major ones on the same pedestal.

Orissa is claimed by some to have been the home of Vajrayana Buddhism and once quite a fertile field also for Sahajayana, the still later offshoot. Buddhist psalms and lyrics of the 7th-9th centuries which we have already discussed were products of these esoteric Buddhist cultures allied to Tantra. These have left an indelible impression on the entire national culture of Orissa. The *Sunyavada* of the Mahayana and the *Pinda-Brahmanda* philosophy (macrocosm in the microcosm) of the Nathas, with a little of yoga, is the stock-in-trade of the entire tribe of metaphysical writers in Oriya not only of this period but all through. And the beginnings of this vast stream are observable in this transitional post-Sarala period.

Nirguna Mahatmya

Oriya metaphysical poetry of this period, however, gains real weight by containing in it the Hindu-Buddhist compromise contained in its final phases. This, as well as the previous literary period, provides clear evidence also that the change-over from Buddhism to Hinduism was far from successful in the beginning, and that there were veiled protests from many a conscientious objector. Here is an instance, one of many such: While we have seen what glorious pictures Sarala Dasa has left of the idealistic Jaina-Buddhist life in his *Mahabharata*, his portrayal of the character of Krishna in the epic,

in which He is the great protagonist, is far from flattering. At the hands of Sarala Dasa, Krishna emerges mostly as a voluptuous libertine and an unscrupulous diplomat. Not long after Sarala Dasa, Chaitanya Dasa in his *Nirguna Mahatmya*, in spite of being a Vaishnava, declares openly the superiority of the Buddha over Krishna as an Avatar of Vishnu. He says in his book (Chapter XVI) that 'Krishna not only abducted many ladies and enjoyed princesses as well as cowherd-girls, he even committed incest with his own aunt and sister. He killed cows and he killed his own uncle.' But he says of the Buddha: 'He condemned sacrifices and preached the knowledge of Brahman. He contrasted the knowledge of Brahman with mere rituals such as pilgrimages, sacrifices, *japas* and fastings and extolled the superiority of *Brahmajnana* over these mere outward performances. The Buddha-Narayana thus discarded all tenets and emphasised self-culture.'

From a revolt of intellectuals such as this in the beginning, how personalities as dissimilar as the Buddha, Krishna and Jagannatha at last completely merged into one Deity in the national consciousness of Orissa, is an amazing event in the story of the evolution of religions. The first part of this story, that which connects the death of Sri Krishna with the emergence of Jagannatha at Puri, through the agency of Jara, the Savara, as described in Sarala's *Mahabharata*, symbolises the fusion of the Aryan and non-Aryan cultures in India, which is only one of the two most significant aspects of the mysterious Deity of Jagannatha. A happy and harmonious compromise between Hinduism and Buddhism in and through the same Deity is the other great aspect. Whether the non-Aryan god was first adopted by Brahminism or Buddhism it is impossible to say with definiteness. But the legends indicate attempts by both religions to claim Him and the subsequent struggles and compromises. The *Deula-Tola Suango* or the 'Temple-Construction ballad' by Bipra Nilambara in Oriya, composed in this period, clearly declares this Hindu-Buddhist compromise. How this compromise has coloured Vaishnavism or the entire Bhakti-cult in Orissa will be evident when we come to the next period of Oriya literature, the great age of religious ferment. But we have in the little ballad of *Deulo-Tola*

Suango of this period, the highly interesting picture of the process of Buddhist-Brahmanic compromise.

The Ballad of the Temple of Jagannatha

Surely, Bipra Nilambara got his cue as well as inspiration from Sarala Dasa but elaborated it in his small poem, which even today is sung by wandering minstrels in rural Orissa or enacted occasionally by the village folk like a mystery play of medieval England. This little poem appears to be the only 'literature' in the whole of the metaphysical and religious writings of this period. It is not excellent in execution in any way, but it has an element of mystery and of human devotion and has become a unique literary document as a record of religious changes in Orissa in remote times, out of all proportion to its real artistic merit.

This is the story of the ballad *Deula-Tola* or the construction of the temple of Jagannatha:

King Indradyumna of Malava wanted to worship Vishnu and sent messengers to the four quarters in search of that Deity. To the East went Vidyapati, the Brahmin. Trekking all the way through dense forests down to the eastern sea-coast he chanced upon the God in the form of a blue stone being secretly worshipped by the Savara Visvavasu in an inaccessible spot of the forest near a Savara village. Visvavasu, finding Vidyapati very handsome, forced him to marry his daughter on pain of death. Vidyapati married and settled down there for some time and then started on his return journey to Malava to inform king Indradyumna of his discovery. The King, with Vidyapati's information, started for the east coast with an army. But when he came to the spot where the blue stone was supposed to be, he did not find it there. Then he surrounded the Savara village and arrested Visvavasu. Visvavasu pleaded innocence. Then a voice in the sky announced that Nila-Madhava (Vishnu as a blue stone) had disappeared because the King had felt proud of his achievement in finding Him at last. The voice said that He would appear again if the King built a suitable temple for Him. King Indradyumna then built the great temple of Jagannatha at great cost and labour. But for the inaugural ceremony no suitable Brahmin was available in the locality.

And the King felt that for a temple of the size he had built for the great God Vishnu, no lesser a priest than Brahma himself should be engaged. So the King went to Heaven to invite Brahma. But Brahma was in meditation at that time and the King had to wait for an hour or so. Brahma, after his meditation, agreed however to come down to the earth to perform the inaugural ceremony.

But during that one hour of Indradyumna's waiting in Brahmaloka, several eons passed by on the earth. The great temple of Indradyumna was buried under sand. A new king by the name of Galamadhava, while once riding on these sands, had stumbled and looking for the cause, found the Chakra of a temple obtruding out of the dunes. He then started excavating and had the entire temple of Jagannatha, as built by Indradyumna, restored. But as he was about to perform the inaugural ceremony, appropriating all the credit for the temple to himself, down came Indradyumna with Brahma as his priest. There was a keen dispute between the two Kings as to who the real builder of the temple was. The decisive evidence was given by the tortoises of the Indradyumna tank,[1] who said that they were human beings, but the long, hard labour of carrying stones for Indradyumna's temple had made them tortoises. This dispute over, Brahma was about to perform the inaugural ceremony. But where was the Deity? How could a temple be inaugurated without its God?

Then King Indradyumna kept a vigil and received the divine message that the God would appear at the mouth of a nearby river in the form of a log of wood. The King found the log next morning, but his entire army could not move it an inch. Then the voice in the void directed the King to get Visvavasu the Savara,[2] and Vidyapati the Brahmin, to hold it on either side and drag. And so, with the co-operation of the non-Aryan and the Aryan, the God of India moved.

Indradyumna's queen Gundicha wished, however, to

[1] This tank with large-size tortoises still exists in Puri.

[2] In the earlier version, as found in Sarala's *Mahabharata*, the Savara is called Jara and the Brahmin from Malava, Visvavasu. But in the version of Bipra Nilambara, the Brahmin emissary is called Vidyapati and the Savara becomes Visvavasu, which is a most unlikely name for a tribal. Sarala's story, therefore, appears to be more genuine and the Brahmin Nilambara's story clearly indicates the complete Brahmanisation of the social life in Orissa by the time this poem was composed.

make an image out of the wood, rather than worship the log as it was. So the King advertised for a suitable carpenter. Many came, but only got their implements spoiled because the wood was hard like stone. Then a very old carpenter made his appearance and convinced the King that he would succeed in making the image. The carpenter imposed the condition that he and the log would be closeted in the *sanctum sanctorum* and nobody should open the doors before three weeks had passed.

For a few days in the beginning, people heard the carpenter's strokes on the wood. But gradually complete silence prevailed. The Queen, apprehending that the poor old carpenter might have died inside the temple, became impatient and wanted the King to open the doors, much against the latter's wish and persuasion. But who can thwart a woman's will? The doors were opened. The carpenter had disappeared, leaving half-finished not one but three images, as they are still today, identified as Krishna, Balarama and their sister Subhadra. To these a little image of Sudarsana Chakra, most probably the Hindu variation of the Buddhist Saddharma Chakra, has been added, thus completing the Hindu-Buddhist fusion.

Anyway, Brahma performed both the inaugural and the installation ceremonies. The newly installed Lord Jagannatha told the King to arrange His services in the following manner:

1. That the descendants of the Savara who had worshipped Him in the form of a blue stone should be His real 'servants' in the Temple.
2. That the descendants of Vidyapati (who discovered Him) through his Brahmin wife would be the priests.
3. That the descendants of Vidyapati through his Savara wife would be His cooks.

The services in the temple of Jagannatha are still arranged on these hereditary divisions. The association of non-Brahmins in the sacred ceremonies and complete absence of caste-feeling within the temple walls give additional proof positive of the reconditioning of Jagannatha from Buddhist and tribal originals.

The Lord at last offered a boon to Indradyumna. But the great royal devotee said, 'My Lord, grant me this boon!

May my family become completely extinct so that there shall be no descendant of mine proudly claiming this temple to have been built by his ancestor.'

That magnanimous prayer was granted. And as yet the King Indradyumna remains a mystery. Thus ends the story of *Deula-Tola* or 'Temple Construction' by Bipra Nilambara, written in this period, a fine record of the metamorphosis of gods and faiths in medieval Orissa.

II. INSPIRATION OF 'GITAGOVINDA'

Chautisas or the Lyrical Ballads

To the average Oriya the combined expression *Koili-chautisa* (already discussed in Chapter VI) mean just the same thing that lyrics and ballads would mean to an educated Englishman. As a matter of fact the *koilis* and *chautisas* in Oriya are a combination of lyrics and ballads and are more aptly described as 'lyrical ballads'.

Koilis are really few in number in Oriya literature and in spite of a differentiating nomenclature just because these are addressed to *koilis* or cuckoos, are really nothing but *chautisas*, they also being composed in thirty-four couplets or stanzas in the alphabetical order from Ka to Ksha, just like the real *chautisas*. Their themes are also of the self-same varieties. So the entire lot of short poems in Oriya in the whole old and medieval periods may be described as *chautisas.*

Chautisa is not indigenous to Orissa. It has come from Sanskrit. I suppose it exists in all other Indian languages. But it may be that in no other sister Indian language the *chautisa* has been so assiduously cultivated and produced with such abundance as in Oriya. Not much of it is visible, at least, in its neighbour Bengali. The passion of the medieval Oriya poets for the *chautisa* reminds one of the fashion of sonneteering in European tongues in and after the Renaissance. *Chautisas* have been written all through the history of Oriya literature. They are written even now. But the most famous ones were probably written in this period. For the convenience of non-Oriya readers I have, therefore, taken liberties with chronology in order to treat the *chautisas* at this place in a general way, for providing a total impression about them all.

The *chautisa*, like the sonnet, gives the poet a well demarcated field to work in, which is a great advantage. The limitations intensify and concentrate the creator's passion and imagination. The alphabetical order, on the other hand, leaves a quick impression on the minds of the illiterate or semi-literate masses. Like the sonnet, the *chautisa* is essentially lyrical, but being nearly three to four times longer than a sonnet, it provides, in spite of limitations, wide enough scope for the narration of incidents.

The themes of the Oriya *chautisas*, now available in excellent anthologies published under the auspices of the Prachi Samiti, appear to be quite varied, in spite of the ubiquity of the voluptuous wailings of separated lovers. Generally the affairs are those between the mythical lovers, Radha and Krishna, but one can easily discern under the thin veneer of two sanctified personalities, the tumultuous passions of the poets themselves for their own sweethearts. On the other hand, the ballads narrating the anecdotes of Rama's life, ceremonies of Lord Jagannatha like the car festival or the *Snana-Yatra* (the Festival of bath) are quite objective, vigorous and realistic. And those expressing personal prayers or describing the vanities of earthly existence are intensely individualistic, throbbing with spiritual and philosophical fervour. One or two, like the celebrated *Jnanodaya koili*, go into the intricacies of Raja-yoga, while one of the two *Ba-Chautisas* naively throws out socio-political prophecies that appear surprisingly applicable to modern conditions.

In the love ballads there is a good deal of the usual conventionality of Indian poetry in the separated lovers' obsession with the various physical charms of their sweethearts, such as the eyes, the cheeks, the teeth, the lips, the breasts, the waist, the thighs, the feet and the arms. The whole of Indian literature is full of these. But with all that, certain pieces reveal at places such realistic and natural feeling and rarefied passion as to turn them into undeniably excellent love poems. The lover in the *Abhinna* (Inseparable) *chautisa* cries out:

> I have put a million kisses, my beloved,
> On these dear letters of yours, letters written in red-lacquer,

And have touched them to my head a million times.
But where are you, my darling, how far away?
Who indeed can fetch you to me?
Shall I ever again part from you for a moment even,
After I return home and am re-united with you?

The lover in *Mandakini chautisa* tries to satisfy his intense longing for his loved one with the following supersensual vision:

Humbled before thy graces, my darling,
This servant of yours,
Shall enter thy Presence,
And standing below thy bed with folded hands
Look upon thee with fear and joy alike in his heart.
He shall look on thy lotus-face
With eyes never blinking,
And shall shake like a leaf in the wind
Unable to restrain his agitation.

In the *Premachintamani chautisa* of Kavisurya Brahma, human love is touchingly sublimated in the lover's defiance of social and religious taboos for the sake of the loved one. In the words of Radha:

I entertain no fear of scandal, my friend,
Determined as I am to serve Him,
My heart has gone to Him
Like an arrow released from the bow!
All my senses are now surrendered to Him
And I tell you in confidence
That I fear not even sin for His sake;
I tell you that to have a glimpse
Of the beauteous Shyama in the solitude of the forest
Is greater joy to me than residence in Paradise.

For the vanities of the world and a call to the spiritual life and also a passion for the Great Lover there is nothing better than the *Manabodha* (Admonitions to the mind) *chautisa* of Bhakta Charana Dasa, equally celebrated as the author also of *Mathura Mangala*. Of all the hundreds of *chautisas* this is the most popular in Orissa. It fulfils its objective in such a masterly

fashion, it lays bare the illusions of worldly existence with such effect and it is written in such melodious lines that, sung to the accompaniment of an *ektara* or even without accompaniment, by a single bass voice, it keeps entire audiences in Orissa silent and spell-bound. From its sonorous, slow-moving lines, charged with vivid imagery, emanate such silent waves of *santarasa* (the sentiment of quietude) that the battle of desires and ambitions in the minds of the listeners is brought to a standstill and they are forced to see Truth in the mirror of Life as it really is. Some of its oft-sung lines are:

I say, O mind, will you listen to me,
And proceed at once to see the beautiful Dark One?
How long have you planned, O mind, to stay here,
And what do you think you shall carry with you at the
hour of departure?

Have you thought, O mind, how this body of yours,
For which you so keenly arrange high beds and soft quilts,
Will stink noisomely, and your bones snatched away
one by one will be devoured by dogs and jackals?

Forgetting God and the wise ones, obsessed as you are
With the amassing of wealth by fair means or foul;
Have you enquired how many of your departed friends
Have taken away their wealth in their bags?

With what gusto have you been accumulating
things for the 'Home'
To which you shall be nothing but the terror of a
Ghost when you die;
And the wife, your very other half, shall try to exorcise you;
Trying with kith and kin to 'purify' her person of
your very touch!

You may look nice as a painting,
But rip off the skin and see the horror inside;
Aren't you merely bones and nerves just covered with
a hide?
And should you still be vain enough not to think of God?

Fine spiritual introspection is revealed also in the *San-kanada chautisa* of Danai Dasa. Without condemning the world so much as in the *Manabodha chautisa* above, Danai Dasa makes

his reflections entirely on a personal level and displays a personality that hungered intensely for the Inner Light. Says he:

I feel miserable all through,
Being blind, in spite of eyes,
And feel, as though enveloped by darkness of the night,
Unable to light the lamp from the Fire that is so close to me;
Have I indeed lost my senses, O Mind?

* * * *

I run madly about, looking for lost treasure,
Treasure that is there, inside my breast.
I never try to know the Reality,
I have failed to achieve anything,
I deserve all my miseries
For not having cared for God as I should have.

But by far the most interesting of the whole lot of these *chautisas*, appears to be the one called *Ba-Chautisa* of Lokanatha. It is entirely secular and socio-political in character. It was written most probably soon after Orissa came under the Moslems in the latter half of the 17th century. It was a time of internecine wars, treacheries, murders, and all manner of political instability and social confusion. The poet must have felt much concerned over this sad national plight and wrote this *chautisa*, most probably as a warning to his people. He has, without doubt, taken the cue from the episode of the advent of the Kali Era in the Svargarohana Parva of the *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa. In the very same manner, King Yudhishthira in this ballad asks brother Sahadeva, the minister, what the condition of state and society in Kaliyuga shall be. Then the poet starts his observations. They are amazingly contemporary. Sahadeva, after casting figures on the floor, says:

Oh King, in the Kaliyuga
Kings will have no mercy for subjects.
They shall oppress the people and extort taxes
Even before the harvest reaches home.

Soldiers shall be solicitious for their lives;
Even when they go to battlefields,
They shall fly to save themselves, not caring
Either for the glory of war or the pleasure of Paradise.

Brahmins shall forget religious practices
And study wrong things.
They shall be happy as cooks, mixing
With Sudras and feel proud
To carry only the lota and umbrella.

One woman shall have three husbands,
Or more, and be eager for yet more,
And with quartets or so of lovers
Little will they care for legal husbands.

The sons shall drive out their old parents
And live selfishly with their young wives,
Or the old fathers may be engaged as servants,
Nobody having any fear of sin.

Brahmin widows will elope with Sudras
And take recourse to contraceptives,
Brahmins, degenerating in low company,
Shall give up Vedic studies and take to the plow.

Young brides will beat their mothers-in-law,
Doctors will give wrong medicines,
And neglect their patients,
Friends will turn treacherous, and the whole of society
Will live on lies and falsehood.

The only historical references in this ballad are the following lines: 'The Orissa state will be enjoyed by the Moghuls, as ordained by the great Yudhishthira.'

Ordered King Yudhishthira to Sahadeva: 'Whosoever shall meet me tomorrow morning will receive the crown of this state.' And so the 'Prince of Delhi' got the royal turban.

This is all about the content of the *chautisas* in general. But the other aspect, that of the musicality of the *chautisas*, is equally significant, coupled with the ornate diction and the general obsession with sex. All these had far-reaching effects on Oriya literature in subsequent periods. But the fountain-head of the whole stream appears to be no other than the *Gitagovinda* of Jayadeva.

The Gitagovinda

The Oriyas are proud to claim Jayadeva as one of them. In contrast to the plain 14-lettered couplets of the *Kalasa chautisa* and Sarala's *Mahabharata*, which are to be read and recited, the *chautisas* that followed were all written in musical metres so as to be 'singable'. The practice of adding music to literature, started in this period, will be seen to gradually spread, pervading the entire literature of Orissa for centuries to come, till the new era begins in the nineteenth century. The *chautisas* were in the nature of early experiments, it seems, in this direction. Two centuries later we shall find entire epics written with an eye to musical recital, the lines loaded with assonances and alliterations for artificial rhythms and more and more obsessed with a voluptuous brooding on sex. All these are qualities preponderant in the little volume of Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda*. They are also in the generality of the Oriya *chautisas*. In no other State of India has the influence of the *Gitagovinda* been so pervasive in art, society and literature as in Orissa. In the sculptures on the temple walls of Bhubaneswara and Konaraka one comes across figures that must have been chiselled out by the artists with some of the famous lines of the *Gitagovinda* ringing in their hearts. The *chautisas* covering Krishna-Radha episodes and even those of ordinary lovers are nothing but imitations of Jayadeva's famous lyrics, so superbly enchanting, for alliterative diction, ravishing music, romantic milieu and voluptuous imagery. The medieval Oriya poets had only tried, it appears, to emulate in the vernacular of the State the Sanskrit model left by a compatriot of theirs in this genre. And the Oriyas might be justifiably proud of the fact that this emulation, at certain places, has equalled the original, if not surpassed it. Through some famous lyrical narratives of Upendra Bhanja, Dinakrishna and Abhimanyu, the superb dictional art and the romantic aroma of the *Gitagovinda* have been the common fare of the Orissa people all these centuries.

The *Gitagovinda* is sung every day in the temple of Jagannatha at Puri as part of the ceremonial worship, a privilege which might not have been conceded if the poet had not been a citizen of the Oriya Gajapati's empire. This was denied to Chaitanya, according to tradition, when he and his followers

wanted to make *kirtana* a part of the daily rituals of Jagannatha, as they were not subjects of the Gajapati. The book *Gitagovinda* again has had more translations into Oriya than, perhaps, into any other Indian language and the translators have been people of such low castes as potters (Uddhava Dasa) and barbers (Trilochana). This indicates clearly the deep influence the book exercised among the people of Orissa. At least two of these translations, out of about half-a-dozen of this period, are of a high order as literature and have been very popular in Orissa all these centuries. These are the *Gitagovinda* by Dharanidhara and the *Rasavaridhi* by Brindabana Dasa. While Dharanidhara, the older of the two, has written in a plain style, keeping mainly to the sentiments, Brindabana Dasa has successfully tried to be as close to the original in both music and meaning as could be possible in any Indian language. Each canto of Brindabana's *Rasavaridhi* is written in a new musical metre with complicated rhythmic patterns to suit particular sentiments. And such translations of the *Gitagovinda* in ornate Oriya may be taken to have been the start of the ornate *chautisas* or the entire ornate *kavya* poetry of medieval Orissa.

This *Gitagovinda* pattern of the entire medieval Oriya literature, the number of translations this book has had in Oriya, the deep influence it has exercised on the art and society of Orissa and the fact that all the events that mattered in the poet Jayadeva's life happened at Puri, as well as the great honour given to his book in the temple of Jagannatha, all naturally make Jayadeva an integral part of Orissa's medieval culture and tend to prove the great poet-saint's Orissan citizenship, as claimed by the Oriyas.

III. SARALA DASA'S INFLUENCE

Episodical Poems under the Influence of Sarala Dasa

In this period we find also the beginnings of the *kavyas* or episodical poems in different metres which were to flood the whole land a century and a half later. The *Ramavivaha* (Marriage of Rama) of Arjuna Dasa and the *Ushabhilasa* (Usha's Desire) by Sisusankara of this period may be taken as independent pioneering works in this genre. In both cases, the stories

have been borrowed direct from Sarala Dasa but embellished with the alliterative sing-song metres that make the incidents suitable for enacting or musical recital. In contrast to the naive, vigorous, and spontaneous diction of Sarala Dasa, the language of these books is chaste, trying to make up for the loss of the natural gusto, forthright clarity and strength of common man's speech in the *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa, by metrical and dictional cleverness. In *Ramavivaha* and *Ushabhilasa* we meet only the beginnings of this. Later it was to be the sole objective of the poets.

Prose

The prose of this period consists of some inscriptions on copper-plate grants as well as a quite interesting family-chronicle, now called 'Choini's Records'. That book is as yet unpublished but has been copiously dealt with in the first volume of *The History of Oriya Literature* by Pandit Suryanarayana Dasa. The life of king Purusottama Deva, son of king Kapilendra Deva, was full of romantic incidents, such as the defeat of eighteen of his step-brothers in the fight for the throne of Orissa, and his victory over Saluva Narasimha, the then king of Kanchi, his romantic marriage with the beauteous princess Padmavati of Kanchi and his battles with the Moslem and and Hindu rulers of the south. He seems to have had a very natural desire to get his extraordinary experiences recorded and to have ordered Sri Gurudasa Choini, a Minister of his, to have it done. And so the records started, and what is more, continued as a family tradition for at least four generations. The language of this family-book gradually improves in expressiveness through successive generations, though not in reliability, revealing the differences in the personalities of the authors. All sorts of absurdities are unhesitatingly recorded as facts and no crisis is without the benevolent protection that the Lord Jagannatha was ever waiting to offer to the kings of Orissa and the pious Brahmins.

But of all these family writers, the one called Fakira Choini seems to have a genuine flair for realism. Here is an interesting story taken out of Fakira Choini's portion of these records, relating the sad fate of an innocent Brahmin who had at last to commit suicide to avoid the teasings and practical

jokes of the naughty children of a village. This seems to have happened in the time of king Purusottama Deva, who, being a man of wide scholarship as well as of real action, seems to have enjoyed good jokes. In the half-visible motley crowd of great events and personalities of ancient Orissa, this little incident of an otherwise unknown common citizen, gains immensely in human value in our eyes, in spite of its tragic ending.

The Story of Mr. Ladle-ful

Brahmins were being feasted. One Adikanda Misra was among them. Somebody asked him if he would have a helping. He (Adikanda Misra) asked what the dish was. On being told that it was *dal*, he said, 'Give me a ladle-ful.' Thereupon other guests started laughing and referred again and again to the word 'ladle-ful'. On the days following, that poor man was shouted at as 'Mr. Ladle-ful' by fellows in the streets. Thereupon he approached the king who forbade the elders to do it. But when the elders stopped, the children took it up and shouted 'Mr. Ladle-ful', whenever Adikanda Misra was out on the streets. He then again approached the king who advised him to satisfy the children with fruits and sweets. The children, glad to get nice things to eat, stopped shouting 'Mr. Ladle-ful', but some naughty ones drew the figure of a ladle on the sand of the street whenever they saw the unfortunate man come out of his home. He approached the king again. This time the king ordered a minister to pave the village street with stones so that boys could not draw the figure of a ladle with their toes as they used to do on the sand. The paving was done. But the boys drew a ladle all the same with pieces of chalk or charcoal. This time the unfortunate Adikanda Misra felt it futile to approach the king again. He killed himself one day by striking his head against the stone pavements to set himself free from the tyranny of a bunch of village boys!

CHAPTER IX

THE AGE OF RELIGIOUS FERMENT

The Historical Background

WE are now in the beginning of the sixteenth century. Sarala Dasa wrote his *Mahabharata* in the reign of King Kapilendra Deva (1435-1466) and the family-chronicle of the Choinis, the last book discussed in the foregoing chapter, was probably written in the time of King Purusottama Deva (1467-1497), son of and successor to Kapilendra Deva. This Purusottama Deva has turned out to be the most legendary king in the history of Orissa. His conquests and marriage have been a fecund source of ballads, dramas, poems and paintings in Orissa for many centuries. Through the plays of Ramasankara, Bhikari Charana and Godavaris (*see* Chapter XV), this king became a symbol of both romance as well as Orissan patriotism during the British period. The legend of this great royal romance, therefore, is given as an appendix to this chapter. Purusottama Deva was succeeded by his son Prataparudra Deva, an accomplished but unlucky prince during whose reign, however, Orissa experienced the twin tidal floods of a religious as well as a literary revolution. These finally left the Vishnu-cult practically the national religion of Orissa. But Vaishnavism in Orissa has had a difference and a distinction all its own, that needs a little explanation.

The Orissan Brand of Vaishnavism

The Vishnu-cult had been slowly making headway in Orissa during the preceding periods. Ramanuja himself visited Puri and Bhubaneswara towards the end of the 12th century and made strenuous efforts to convert all other denominations to his cult. Then Jayadeva in the thirteenth century exercised a tremendous influence among all classes of people in Orissa, inclining them towards Krishna-worship, as has already been said in the previous chapter. Next came Narasimha Muni and Narahari Tirtha from the Canarese-speaking country. They are said to have stabilised in Orissa what Ramanuja started

earlier. At the time we are discussing, Jagannatha, the national God of Orissa, had firmly established himself in the people's mind as the harmonious combination of the Buddha, Krishna and Rama. It is now difficult to say exactly who actually linked the Buddha of Kapilavastu to the wooden Vishnu image of Jagannatha and got this Buddha-Jagannatha accepted as the 9th Avatar of the Hindu pantheon. As we have hinted earlier, the Vajrayana of Indrabhuti must have played a considerable part in this transformation. We have, in Bipra Nilambara's *Deula-Tola Saunga*, discussed in the last chapter, only an allegorical representation of this metamorphosis. But by the twelfth century the assimilation was perhaps an accepted fact as Jayadeva in the 13th century proclaimed it in sonorous stanzas with unchallenged conviction. Most probably it was Ramanuja who gave the final touches to the fusion of the Buddha and Vishnu in the godhead of Jagannatha, for which the Vajrayani Buddhists probably had already prepared an excellent foundation.

In spite of all religious changes through the centuries, Orissa's national consciousness, however, remained basically Buddhistic. From the psalms of Buddhism written in the 7th-9th centuries down to modern times, the main tenets of Mahayana Buddhism plus the *pinda-brahmanda* theory of the Natha-Yogis have come again and again to the surface. Whatever the dominant cult, the Buddhistic influence has never been lost in the religious feeling of the people of Orissa.

At the time we are about to discuss, there had appeared in Orissa a band of poets-cum-religious reformers who, though outwardly Vaishnavites, were without doubt actually doing what genuine followers of the Buddha might have done. The main common characteristics of these poet-reformers are:

1. They preferred meditation on the Formless to images, though the idol of Buddha-Jagannatha represented to them not only Vishnu, but even the *Sunya* and *Alekh* (The Void, the Imageless) they were preaching about.
2. They accepted all-surrendering devotion as a means of salvation, but advocated a preparatory stage of inner purification through meditation and Hatha-yogic and Raja-yogic practices.

3. One and all hated rituals and showed hostility to professional priests as a class. They preached against caste and claimed the right of the Sudra to read and expound the Vedas and the Vedanta.
4. They were souls dedicated to the spiritual upliftment of the common man, and were deliberately writing in the language of the people in order to accomplish their purpose like the Buddhists, even though some of them were erudite Sanskrit scholars.

These author-saints being five in number and having been on close, intimate and personal terms of relationship with one another, they are known generally as Pancha-sakhas or the five comrades. Together, they—the Dasas Balarama, Jagannatha, Ananta, Yasovanta and Achyuta—have left behind an enormous amount of religious literature in Oriya and are still read and revered by millions in Orissa.

Chaitanya and Orissa

And into this group came Chaitanya from Bengal in A.D. 1510. He permanently settled down in Puri just because he found the Vaishnavic atmosphere congenial. It enjoyed a stable and secure existence there as already described. On the other hand it is not known to many that there was tremendous opposition to his sentimental Bhakti-cult from the intellectuals of contemporary Orissa. The Brahmins of Orissa, as a class, are intensely hostile to Chaitanyism and some of its ceremonies, even today. Almost the major part of the prose work of Pandit Nilakantha Dasa, the doyen of literary circles in Orissa at present, is a bitter diatribe against the Chaitanyan Bhakti-cult and its evil effects on Orissa's social life. But this is not an isolated or abnormal case. It is typical of the general attitude of the Orissa intelligentsia. The pathetic decline of the Oriyas as an independent, virile nation, mostly as a result of this Hindu saint's long sojourn in Orissa, is graphically described by the great Bengalee historian, R. D. Banerjee, in his *History of Orissa* (Vol. I).

But the great saint was on the most intimate terms with the contemporary Oriya writers now called the Pancha-sakhas. Of Jagannatha Dasa, almost his own age, Chaitanya was not

only a friend but a great admirer. To others he was the adored spiritual Guru. And to the masses of Orissa, he proved to be a veritable fountain-head of unprecedented spiritual enthusiasm. Even today to millions in Orissa Chaitanya is the only God. Chaitanya loved everything of Orissa, firstly because it was a congenial and free Hindu land at that time as against the Moslem-dominated Bengal, and secondly because it was the land of his ancestors.[1] His grandfather had come from Jajpur (Dist. Cuttack) which is still the seat of renowned and cultured Misra-Brahmins like Chaitanya's ancestors. He left it as a result of some personal persecution during the reign of Kapilendra Deva, the grandfather of Prataparudra Deva, Chaitanya's contemporary and admirer. While in Orissa, Chaitanya spoke Oriya and sang Oriya songs and frequently visited Jajpur, his ancestral home.

But contrary to the false propaganda carried on so far, the fact remains that in spite of close association with them, Chaitanya has left absolutely no impression on the writings of the Pancha-sakhas, except that he is mentioned as a saint here and there. This indicates that the hard core of Orissa's national character, in spite of outward acquiescence, at heart resisted the over-sentimental philosophy of Chaitanya. As a matter of fact, the two most important in the group of the 'five comrades', Dasas Balarama and Jagannatha, had each completed his *magnum opus* before Chaitanya's arrival in Orissa. And their later writings only continue the Buddha-Vaishnavic traditions, the indigenous pattern of Orissa's religious life for centuries. But there is no doubt that the wide and instantaneous publicity and popularity that the Pancha-sakhas won all over Orissa was to no small extent due to the presence of Chaitanya at Puri and their association with him. The great saint's entirely God-dedicated personality was the greatest argument in favour of the Bhakti-cult and an entire literature was produced to propagate it. That Chaitanya's presence at Puri was a great, though indirect, blessing to the Pancha-sakha literature in Orissa, there is no doubt.

But if in Orissa Indian culture in some of its fine pristine aspects is still alive, this is really due to the excellent missionary work that the Pancha-sakhas did in Oriya literature during

[1] Readers are referred to Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen's *Chaitanya and his Age.*

the sixteenth century. The bad effects on the still vigorous literature of the Oriyas of the Chaitanyite philosophy with its sexological symbols and its sublimation of illegal love, become visible a little later, after the noble-hearted outpourings of the five comrades were expended and after Orissa ceased to be an independent central power. This happened within two decades of Chaitanya's passing away.

THE FIVE COMRADES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

Poet Balarama Dasa and the Oriya Ramayana

Of the Pancha-sakhas or the famous band of five comrades in Oriya literature who flourished in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the oldest and the most talented was Balarama Dasa, the author of the Oriya *Ramayana*. Born in 1472 he was a man of middle age by the time Chaitanya established himself at Puri, with most of his important literary works already produced. These clearly reveal their author to have been temperamentally a pious and devotional man, though shining through all his conventional behaviour was a bright wick of sharp free-thinking, that grew, however, gradually dim and was at last altogether extinguished by the emotional outbursts that became a part of his nature after he came under the hypnotising influence of Chaitanya. Poet Balarama came to be known among the common folk of Puri as Mad Balarama or Matta Balarama because perhaps, in his later years he tried to emulate his master, Chaitanya, in all sorts of sentimental antics such as quaking, weeping, and running hither and thither in search of the Beloved!

His Theological Works

But in the most important of his theological books Balarama Dasa preaches again and again that Divinity really resides inside us and that He has to be realised through quiet meditation and severe mental discipline. This is indeed the whole burden of the sermons of all the Pancha-sakhas. But the whole lot landed into inextricable mental confusion because of the overpowering influence of the Deity of Jagannatha and also that of Sri Chaitanya, the greatest of that God's contemporary

worshippers. Thus, for example, while in books like the *Vedantasara Gita*, *Gupta Gita*, *Virata Gita* and *Saptanga Yogasara Tika*, Balarama Dasa tries to expound in popular form the principles of Hatha and Raja Yoga as well as the metaphysics of Vedanta, in a book like *Vata Abakash*, he extols Lord Jagannatha, whose daily court is attended not only by the thirty-three crores of divinities of the Hindu pantheon, but also by many of the celebrated local deities of Orissa belonging to all denominations. The devotional and poetic part of Balarama's personality is best revealed in the book *Bhava-Samundra* (Sea of Emotion).

The True Bhakta

A seat in the car of Jagannatha during the Car Festival at Puri is a great privilege to the devout and implies great social prestige also as the Gajapati monarchs of Orissa used to ride in it. Their descendants do so today. Generally, high officials and Brahmins occupy the car in the privileged company of the earthly as well as the Divine King. When Balarama was perhaps comparatively unknown, he once tried to get into the car, impelled probably by sheer devotional intensity. But he was beaten and thrown off in the presence of the King and the vast crowd that had gathered for the festival. This must have been crushingly mortifying to the sensitive poetic soul of young Balarama. He ran from the city to the solitudes of the Puri sea-beach and poured out his heart in shame, anger, defiance and prayer in a long lyric of 750 stanzas called *Bhava-Samundra* or the 'Sea of Emotion' which is indeed a justifiable title, containing as it does the tumultuous feeling of a frustrated spirit. But the way the poet belittles his own Lord displays not only a very daring mind, but also a clear transparent spirit in poised relation with a Higher Power. With reference to the abduction of Sita, he says:

> That you Jagannatha, let your wife go to Ravana,
> Is very like you;
> Not able to maintain your own wife
> Why did you blame another for doing it?
> And she, tired of suffering so much with you,
> Went rightly to a man who would make her comfortable!

And are you indeed worthy of that beauteous
daughter of King Janaka?
Believe me, My Lord, you look like no more
Than a servant beside her!

Referring to Jagannatha's keeping His sister Subhadra constantly in His company, leaving His consort Lakshmi away at a distance in a separate temple in the same compound, he says:

In taking your sister along with you
And leaving your wife behind,
On this Car journey to Gundicha House,
Are you not insulting the goddess Lakshmi?
Where indeed are your manners!

The poet even challenges Jagannatha's existence in Orissa!

My Lord, your home is outside Jambudvipa,
At Dvaraka, somewhere in the sea,
Why don't you go back to live in your own land?
Why are you here, in our country?
Have you made yourself overlord here
To insult innocents like Bali Dasa?

But the sublime, all-forgiving, self-forgetting love and devotion of a pious soul comes out at innumerable places like this:

You made me a prisoner at the hands of the King,
But I have made you a prisoner in the secrecy of my
heart!
Tell me, my Lord, that you are my Prisoner,
And that gives me blessed happiness!

His Smaller Works

Balarama Dasa has left behind a very large number of smaller works like this *Bhava-Samundra*, besides his *magnum opus*, the *Ramayana*. Almost all of them are still popular, but the most universally read and enjoyed of his small pieces are the *Mriguni Stuti* (The Hind's Prayer) and the *Lakshmi Purana Suanga*. The deer's prayer propagates the Bhakti and Vishnu cults through the sad predicament of a deer being caught between a hunter in front and a forest fire behind. She is saved from this situation through prayers to the Lord who sent clouds to quench the fire and a snake to bite the hunter. *Lakshmi Purana*,

on the other hand, is a unique literary product, propagating the superiority of the quiet unostentatious life of a woman to the noisy activities of a man. Even today, after five centuries, this book provides one of the finest, most highly edifying and intensely entertaining folk-plays in Orissa, and for that reason this is described in more detail in the Chapter XV on plays and theatres in Orissa.

The First Oriya 'Ramayana'

The *Ramayana* of Balarama Dasa is one of the three nation-building books in Orissa, the other two being Sarala's *Mahabharata*, and Jagannatha Dasa's *Bhagavata*. What makes it unique is its excellence as a narrative with very effective dialogues, its portrayal of character, making the heroes and heroines of the epic much more human and natural than in, say, the *Ramayana* of Tulasi Dasa, and above all its purely Oriya composition. In the words of B. C. Mazumdar, the editor-compiler of the *Typical Selections from Oriya Literature* published under the auspices of the Calcutta University, 'Balarama Dasa, as a national poet, has sung for the people and by making Orissa a miniature world by itself has taught his countrymen to love the land of their birth; the Kailasa of the far north has been located in Orissa and the Kapilasa Hill of Dhenkanal has been made the Kailasa Mountain; even the hilly tracts of Orissa have been made to bear the footprints of Rama and the forest tribes of the country have been arrayed as the camp-followers of Rama; in the Kishkindhya Kanda, for instance, the rude tribes of Bamra and Bonai states have been mentioned among the soldiers recruited by Rama.'

Sita in Balarama Dasa's *Ramayana* is wholly a sad, lovely, faithful Oriya bride, piously obeying her mother-in-law, silently bearing all her jealous scoldings. She cooks for and serves the guests of her great husband with purely Oriya sweets and dishes. And how deeply human their mutual love becomes when Rama, seeing the princess Sita asleep on a rough bed of grass on the first night of their exiled life at the Chitrakuta hill, bewails his lot with noble despair like this:

'Brother Lakshmana, see how worthless God has made me! I wish the Creator had sown a plant in my place; a plant, though insensible, would at least give fruits which could be enjoyed

by many creatures. In accepting my hand, this darling daughter of king Janaka has incurred much suffering. She sleeps now on a bed of grass. How can I keep this life of mine at this sight? So saying Raghava was lost in reverie.'

All his works reveal the poet Balarama to have been also a great social reformer at heart. He genuinely believed in a casteless society and hated the Brahmin priest for degrading religion to a mere means of making money and a livelihood. Living in Puri he knew how the priests tyrannise over innocent pilgrims and must have ground his teeth in impotent rage and hatred at what he saw taking place in the name of religion—things that happen even today. He never missed an opportunity therefore to show the professional priests of Hinduism in the lurid light they deserve:

Rama and Sita, after they offered Pinda at Gaya, were surrounded by the Pandas for their *dakshina* (gift). Rama said that they were wandering exiles, living on roots and fruits of the jungle, and that he had no money with him to offer them. Then he, with his brother and wife, passed on. But the Pandas kept on following till they had covered nearly ten miles. Then Rama turned back and said, 'I have told you that I have nothing to spare for you and still you have followed me all these ten miles!' The Pandas replied, 'We have heard you are a prince. Don't tell us a lie. What about the precious jewels that wife of yours wears? You can't say you are poor with all that jewellery on your wife!' Said Rama, 'Am I going to satisfy you with my wife's jewellery? Please be off and leave us in peace.'

But the Pandas still followed them and tried to pull pieces of jewellery off from the person of Sita. One of the scoundrels caught hold of the end of her sari and would not let her go. Thereupon Lakshmana, on the orders of Rama, cut off the end of her sari with his sword, to free Sita from the greedy Brahmins, and Rama cursed the Brahmins saying: 'It is sad to see you, Brahmins of this holy place, misbehave like this. You do not even spare women. I curse you that you shall, as a class, go begging for a living forever!'

Undaunted by the curse, the Pandas started taunting them behind their backs as Rama, Sita and Lakshmana went on their journey. 'You hypocrites,' said the Pandas, 'with matted

hair and ochre-colour robes! Have you not kidnapped this pretty thing from somewhere? Two fellows enjoying the same woman!'

If the poet wished to bring about social reform through satires and lampoons he desired no less to create a nobler society through the appealing humanisation of his characters:

During his mad wanderings, after Sita's abduction, Rama became pleased with a crane for giving him information about her. The great hero blessed the little bird saying that during the four rainy months of the year, he should have food supplied by his 'wife', instead of having to wander about in inclement weather as during other months of the year. The bird did not relish the idea of taking food from an inferior creature like a wife. Great Rama, divining the poor crane's misgivings, said: 'Husband and wife are two bodies with the same soul. There need be no question here of superior or inferior. Both are the equals of each other.'

On return to Ayodhya after his long exile, Rama treated all his friends and followers to a grand dinner, served by Sita herself. At the end of the feast, Rama, the royal host, apologised in the finest form of social etiquette, for any shortcomings, as they had just returned home after long absence and so arrangements were necessarily far from satisfactory. Through these small human touches, Balarama makes his hero immensely great in our eyes.

Like the *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa among four or five other *Mahabharatas* in Oriya, the *Ramayana* of Balarama Dasa is the most popular among more than thirty distinct variations of the great epic of Valmiki in Orissa. It is supposed to be the earliest vernacular *Ramayana* in the whole of North India. Tulasi Dasa in Hindi and Krittibasa in Bengali came 50 years later. Balarama's epic, moreover, is much more original and national than that of any of his opposite numbers in any other Indian language. No wonder, therefore, that the Bengali critic B. C. Majumdar (in *Typical Selections from Oriya Literature*) takes this and Sarala's *Mahabharata* to be practically original works, retold in the Oriya way for the entertainment and upliftment of the Oriyas. Balarama Dasa wrote his *Ramayana* in the *Dandi-vritta* variety of the 14-letter metre, the same metre in which Sarala Dasa wrote his *Mahabharata* a century before him, for

the recitational effectiveness of their respective epics. This *Dandivritta* has already been explained in Chapter VI.

Jagannatha Dasa and his Oriya 'Bhagavata'

Unlike most Oriya writers, Jagannatha Dasa, the second of the celebrated five comrades, was a Brahmin and a scholar in Sanskrit. He was many years junior to Balarama Dasa and almost of the same age as Chaitanya himself. Chaitanya first met him under the so-called eternal banyan tree (Kalpa bata) within the precincts of the Jagannatha temple, reciting there his recently composed Oriya *Bhagavata* to illiterate folk from the rural areas. The Bengali saint, like the common folk, was charmed to listen to the episodes of Krishna's life described in such soft, sonorous, rhythmic, and mellifluous couplets. These are outstanding characteristics of Jagannatha's popular *Bhagavata*. The saint intuitively saw in the poet a spiritual kinship that developed into warm, life-long friendship. Like Chaitanya in Bengal, it is interesting to note, Jagannatha Dasa in Orissa also became the subject of the earliest biographies. And like the Bengali biographies of Chaitanya, these Oriya biographies of Jagannatha also are a little too full of miracles and other incredible stuff. But some facts do come out as probable enough for general acceptance..

A Mother's Pious Wish builds a Nation

He appears to have been born of parents from whom he inherited his saintly character, scholarly pursuits and his interest in the Puranas. His father was a Purana-Panda, or a professional reciter of Puranas. His mother was pious enough to give him the incentive to write the book that has made her son a household word in Orissa, the most outstanding author in the national consciousness of the Oriyas.

It is said that his old widowed mother, who was illiterate, wished to know more fully the life and glories of Krishna and so enrich her religious culture in her old age. She could not understand the Sanskrit *Bhagavata*. So the noble son, to fulfil his mother's pious desire, started writing the Oriya *Bhagavata* chapter by chapter, and recited each to her. Little did the old lady realise that out of her humble desire was to grow a scriptural composition that was not only to touch individually the

souls of millions in and outside Orissa, generation after generation but to bind together a dismembered people for centuries and be the banner of their national existence.

There must be few books in the whole of Indian literature that can compare in depth and pervasive influence with this Oriya *Bhagavata* of Jagannatha Dasa. Says the Bengali scholar B. C. Majumdar in his introduction to *Typical Selections from Oriya Literature:* 'There cannot be any hesitancy in making this statement that Jagannatha Dasa, by presenting his Oriya *Bhagabat* to the people, induced all classes of men of his country to cultivate the vernacular language. The benefit which Jagannatha Dasa has conferred upon his countrymen is immense, how the moral ideas preached by him in the book have moulded and still moulding the character of many million of men can be easily appreciated...When the people learnt that the *Bhagabat,* which is the most sacred of sacred books, was within their easy reach, the people took to the study of the vernacular with uncommon zeal and energy. This is why the art of reading and writing is known and practised by the common people more extensively in Orissa than in Bengal. Long ago, Bhudev Mukherjee as Inspector of Schools duly observed this fact of Oriya mass education and reported the matter in his public report....I cannot too highly speak of what Jagannatha Dasa has done to raise his countrymen to a higher level of moral existence. No poet of old time enjoys so much popularity as poet Jagannatha Dasa does...There is not a single Hindu village in Orissa where at least a portion of Jagannatha Dasa's *Bhagabat* is not kept and daily recited.'

The *Bhagavata ghar* (*ghar*=home) is an integral part of rural community life in Orissa, as already described in Chapter I. It is or was till recently a multi-purpose village institution—the village school, the village hall, and the village library, all combined into one. A *Bhagavata ghar* was the rallying point for the entire village life. The great Sankara Deva of Assam, who occupies in Assamese life a position similar to that of Jagannatha Dasa in Orissa and who spent many years in Puri and Orissa, probably took the idea for the *Nam-ghars* in Assam from the *Bhagavata ghars* of Orissa. In the darkest days of the Oriya people when, for four centuries, they lay dismembered and scattered as neglected and exploited minorities, their

language and nationality systematically extirpated by big neighbours, it was this *Bhagavata* of Jagannatha Dasa more than any other book or institution that kept their Oriya nationalism secretly alive, enabling them, even in hostile and inhospitable pockets, to be reunited again as a homogeneous people after centuries of suffering. Even today this *Bhagavata* may be found in a hundred thousand homes outside the political boundaries of the Orissa State—in Bengal, Bihar, Madhyapradesh and Andra Desh—the commonest and the surest symbol of Oriya nationalism.

But critically considered, Jagannatha Dasa was in no sense a literary or creative genius like Sarala Dasa or even Balarama Dasa. The immense popularity of his book reminds one of that of the Authorised Version of the English Bible whose authors also were not creative writers in any sense. What makes Jagannatha's *Bhagavata* as popular with the Oriya masses as is the English Bible among the English-speaking people, is just what is called the 'Biblical idiom' in English. Jagannatha's *Bhagavata* is a miracle of translation. It is far from accurate, far from precise and clear, like the English Bible, but its general aroma of sanctity, its soft fluency, its quiet dignity and the sublime air of high moral and spiritual life it breathes, go straight into the hearts of hearers and readers. Of all the books in Oriya literature it is in the *Bhagavata* of Jagannatha that one comes across the mysterious 'Biblical idiom'. Combining the classical Sanskrit with colloquial Oriya idioms and phrases, choosing only what is elegant and rhythmic in diction, instinctively caring more for beauty of expression than for pedantic accuracy and surcharging the whole with a subtle mystic atmosphere in which details may not be clear all at once, but the totality is charming to the mind as well as to the ear, Jagannatha has left behind a style in Oriya which for its chastity, elegance, dignity and beauty still remains inimitable. Among the masses of Orissa, lines from this book are most quoted, suiting them to various situations. As against the Krishna-Radha cult which Chaitanya universalised in Orissa thus doing eternal harm to the nation's character-training and social morals, the book of Jagannatha has laid what foundation there is in the Oriyas of healthy piety and morality.

Jagannatha's *Bhagavata* is far from a literal translation of the

original in Sanskrit. The great author has manipulated material with a view to making the book generally likeable to the Oriya people. In the opinion of Dr. Artavallabha Mahanty: 'In a sense the Oriya *Bhagabât* is better than the Sanskrit *Bhagabat* because some of the stories of the Sanskrit *Bhagabat* have been substituted by better ones from *Vishnu, Padma, Brahmavaivarta* and other *Vaishnava Puranas*.' (From Dr Mahanty's unpublished notes on Oriya literature). Accurate translations of the Sanskrit *Bhagavata* there are many in Oriya, in prose and verse. But the masses in Orissa prefer Jagannatha's book to any other as they get in it the freshness of an original mind and the impress of a saintly soul. As has already been noted before, the work has without doubt had the advantage of wide publicity in Orissa because of Chaitanya's presence in the land and the emotional outburst he caused in the country for the Krishna-cult, exactly at the time when it came out. For the man and his book the times were extremely propitious. Such good luck does not always come to great books or writers.

His Theological Works

All the other works of Jagannatha are beneath consideration as literature. In *Artha-koili*, for instance, he has tried to give pedantic, dry-as-dust, and absurd theological interpretations to the naively charming *Kesava-koili* of Markanda Dasa, written before Sarala Dasa. This was the result, I am afraid, of the general eagerness for esoteric knowledge, practices and experiences prevalent in those days. In his other famous book *Tulabhina* (Cotton-carding) he repeats also this unintelligible, inconsistent, absurd metaphysical rigmarole. Here is a sample:

Says Siva to Parvati:

Mathura is the great Void. It came into existence out of light. Out of this existence came the half-letter. Basudeva is the Bindu (the drop) and Devaki is the half-letter. Out of that half-letter was born 'Kling' or Krishna. Ra and Ma, these two sounds of black and white colour, were then generated. The body came out of the mother's lotus. Those two letters were Radha and Krishna. They came to Brindaban out of the great Void. Brindaban is this body. They are incarnate in this body.

Elsewhere, while reviewing a book on the Pancha-sakhas written by a Santiniketan scholar, I have said that a large portion of what these 'five comrades' have left—and that is indeed enormous—is utter confusion of thought and should not even be treated as 'literature', let alone be discussed as such. I still stand by that statement. The Pancha-sakhas of whom Jagannatha is the most typical example, did real good, however, to the nation when they spoke to the common people in terms of their common experiences. That was their literary and missionary side. But the other side of their mental make-up—the theological, metaphysical and religious—was a bewildering confusion, which has left undesirable trends indelibly imbedded in the national mind.

It appears that Jagannatha Dasa never married and spent his life in yogic practices. The little brick temple in the solitude of the Puri sea-beach which he built for his personal meditations has recently been discovered and excavated by sheer accident, but is in a dilapidated state. There cannot be two opinions that this should be preserved as a national monument.

Jagannatha has left behind a *math* at Puri and a sect also, the 'Atibadi Sect' named from the honorific of 'Atibada' or (greatly great) which Chaitanya is said to have conferred on him out of his respect for his saintly character and high spiritual qualities. This creator of the Oriya Bible is indeed a national poet and a proletarian author par excellence, like Tulasi Dasa in Hindi and the great creater of the Kural in Tamil.

The Three Other Comrades. Malikas or Prophecies

Of the remaining three Dasas of the Pancha-sakha group, Dasas Ananta and Yasovanta have only the glory of association with the great, rather than any high intrinsic literary merit of their own. They too wrote, but wrote mostly about the abracadabra of Tantra and Yoga as well as the miracles of Bhakti. Yasovanta Dasa is now remembered only through his ballad of Govinda Chandra, sung by Natha cult mendicant singers. This is a story from Bengal, of a prince of that name who renounced royal comforts for an ascetic life, strangely enough on the advice and persistent pursuasion of his own mother. The prince's yogic guide was Hadipa, an untouchable. All

this fitted very well into the ascetic and cosmopolitan aspirations of the 'five comrades' and was therefore taken up by one of them for popularisation among the masses. It must be said to the credit of Yasovanta Dasa that this literary venture of his has been quite successful. This book is the main stock-in-trade of the Natha mendicants of Orissa even today. The story casts a spell of mystic melancholy over ladies in rural areas.

They, these two, and also the third, Achyutananda Dasa, indulged in prophecies called *malikas,* so vague and so general in nature that it does not require extraordinary vision for anybody to foresee that sort of future. Critically considered, most of these are just muddle-headed imagination or apocryphal stuff fathered by unscrupulous followers. One wonders what good all this has done to the people. But a general note which runs through all these *malikas* appears to be rather striking. It is this, that in the times to come: (i) the Brahmins will deteriorate to the level of the Sudras; (ii) there shall be no castes, all being equal in status; and (iii) after many catastrophies there shall be a revival of spirituality under the guidance of a new prophet.

Achyutananda, the Greatest Social Poet

As a matter of fact, Achyutananda Dasa, the youngest of the 'five comrades' is still famous today among the people in Orissa more for his *malikas* or prophecies than for anything else. Even educated people unearthed lines from his *malikas* to prove that four centuries ago great Achyutananda Dasa had predicted the disastrous floods in Orissa that occurred in 1955.

But his predictions apart, Achyutananda Dasa, alone of the three remaining Dasas, is notable for other lasting contributions to the national life in Orissa. Of all the five comrades he, the youngest, was the most active social reformer. Though born in a respectable Karana family, he is now the patron saint of millions of Keutas (fishermen) and Gaudas (cowherds). He actually lived among them and for the first time in their social history imparted to them the mantras and sastras. These had been confined to the Brahmins and a few other high castes. To explain the esoteric truths in their own terms he wrote

Kaivarta Gita for the benefit of the fishermen, and the series of *Gopalanka Ogala* (Riddles for the Cowherds) for the cowherds. This sort of social sensitiveness in an author was remarkable in that time and we have not really many instances of it, at least in Oriya literature.

For the general readers also, apart from a few particular social sections that he wanted to enlighten, Achyutananda wrote incessantly. Says Dr Artavallabha Mahanty: 'He is reputed to have written one lakh treatises in Oriya verse of different kinds on religion. He wrote 36 *samhitas*, 78 *gitas*, 27 *vamsanucharitas* besides the 7 volumes of *Harivamsa*, 12 *upavansas*, 100 *malikas*, some *koilis*, some *chautisas*, *tikas*, *vilasas*, *nirnayas*, *ogalas*, *gujjaris* and *bhanjanas*.'

Most probably there have been many Achyutananda Dasas, though all their writings, for lack of critical study, are fathered upon one celebrated man of the same name. Either that or the word 'grantha' which is used in enumerating his works, really means couplets or stanzas and not books.

But it is this Achyutananda who wrote the most important of the *Gitas* and *Samhitas*, such as *Gurubhakti Gita*, *Anakar Samhita*, *Chahayalisa Patala*, etc. that go under that name. This we have little reason to doubt. In all that genre we see the impress of one single, whole, ascetic personality. They reveal the author to be, in spite of being a disciple of Chaitanya, more a Buddhist than an emotional Vaishnavite. The main advocacy of his pen is for the worship of the *Sunya* and the *Alekha* and for discovering the 'Lord of the Worlds' inside one's self. Indeed, the rise and spread of the Mahima cult in Orissa two centuries later—a cult having striking similarities with Mahayana Buddhism—is now traced to the writings of this Achyutananda Dasa.

The *Harivamsa* of Achyutananda, like the *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa and the *Ramayana* of Balarama Dasa, is almost an original work, retaining only the framework of the Sanskrit model. This book describes the life-story of Krishna, the Lord of the Gopala class, probably to bolster up the social status and social consciousness of the cowherds in Orissa, of whom Achyutananda still remains the patron-saint. This book is placed next to the *Bhagavata* of Jagannatha Dasa among Orissa masses as a Sacred Book. Pious rural folk arrange the full recitation

of all its seven volumes as fulfilment of vows to gods and goddesses, after their prayers have been granted.

But Achyutananda was far from being a literary creator or a literary artist in spite of his enormous output. He lives in the memory of the people mostly as a saint and a prophet. He has left much more autobiographical material than any other Oriya author of olden times. The villages and places associated with him are still there and his descendants are still living, accepted and revered by millions of followers as the custodians of the Master's words.

The True People's Poets

Together, these 'Five Comrades' make a unique band of writers in Oriya literature. Sarala Dasa was a path-finder, a genius, a great inventor. It has to be admitted that but for him, the 'Five Comrades' might not have come to light at all. But while Sarala Dasa wrote only out of the irrepressible urge of his genius, caring little for the effect of what he wrote on the national mind and character, here was a band of writers who consciously dedicated their pens to the service of God and the common man, God's favourite. For the education and regeneration of the people in Orissa, they exercised their pens in all possible manner. They brought the spiritual lore that was as yet a sealed book in Sanskrit to the doorsteps of the peasant's cottage. Through their *Ramayana*, *Bhagavata* and *Harivaṃsa* they made all the esoteric teachings accessible to the common Oriya, unschooled in Sanskrit. They wrote ballads to carry their messages of ideal living and desirable attitudes to life even to the illiterate womenfolk in the inner courtyards. Even now Yasovanta Dasa's *Govinda Chandra*, or Balarama's *Baula Gai* or *Lakshmi Purana Suanga* or Jagannatha's *Mriguni Stuti*, constitute the main stock-in-trade of the wandering minstrels of Orissa. Their recitals of these ballads from door to door to the accompaniment of the mono-string *kendra*, draw children and womenfolk to the doors, windows and streets as though by magic. Their appeal is undying because they were written by devout souls with eyes fixed on the common man's spiritual benefit. All that is moral, cultural or holy in rural Orissa even today, is most certainly due to the sincere missionary labours of these Five Comrades five centuries ago.

But an impartial historian of literature must point out that as people's poets, these ascetic comrades failed the nation in one direction and that too most gravely, with tragic consequences. They perhaps aimed at Brahminising the masses. But they forgot that a Brahmin, or an entire society for that matter, can exist peacefully only because there is a Kshatriya to save the fields, the schools and the temples of a nation from the ruffian hands of invaders. They taught the Oriyas to be goody-goody, pious citizens, renouncing material ambitions, controlling their breathing or telling their rosaries. This was the ideal they held out for the society. But it was a tragically unbalanced and lop-sided ideal, completely ignoring the rude realistic demands of social and political life. No wonder, therefore, that with all their pious labours, Orissa was overrun by alien conquerors within decades of the passing away of these 'Comrades'. They, no less than Chaitanya, are responsible in no small measure for the rapid decline of an independent State that had successfully resisted alien invasion for about three centuries. Alas, if they had written a few words about true manly conduct or about resistance to evil, the worst form of which is the desecration of one's hearth and home—if they had done that anywhere in the enormous mass of literature they left behind, Orissa, or India for that matter, would not have had to wait five centuries for such a message from another pious soul, the great Father of our Nation, the Mahatma—a message that combined Fight with Piety in a manner unheard of before.

Appendix to Chapter IX

The Romance of King Purushottama and its historic offshoot

The king of Kanchi came to Puri to see the Car Festival of Jagannatha. According to an excellent custom signifying the renunciation of all earthly pride before the Divinity, the king of Orissa has to sweep the street in front of the cars with a golden broom, before the Deities start on their journeys. Even now the Raja of Puri, the descendant of the historic

Gajapatis, performs this rite at the Car Festival every year. But the king of Kanchi despised the king of Orissa when he saw him do such lowly work. Young Purushottama, meanwhile, saw the Kanchi princess who was in the company of her father. For both of them it was a case of love at first sight. Soon after, emissaries from Orissa appeared at the court of Kanchi and asked for the hand of the princess for Orissa's young and handsome king. But the Kanchi king refused to give his daughter away in marriage to a king who behaved like a scavenger. Young Purushottama took this refusal as an insult not so much to himself as to Lord Jagannatha. So Orissa's armies marched south to wreak vengeance on King Narasimha Salwa of Kanchi.

The king of Kanchi was defeated and his city plundered. Part of the booty was the princess Padmavati, whom the king swore to give in marriage to a real scavenger (Chandala) in order to avenge the insult meted out to the king of Orissa by her father. He handed her to his Prime Minister commanding him to arrange such a marriage.

The next Car Festival came round. The young king Purushottama was secretly pining in his heart for Padmavati, but, real king that he was, he would not show his weakness to anybody. At the Car Festival the king was busy sweeping the street when his wily chief minister, who knew his master's feelings, brought forth the sorrowing princess and presented her to the king. Purushottama flew into a rage. But the minister replied: 'Your Majesty is now no other than a Chandala. So, I offer you this daughter of the king of Kanchi in marriage as commanded by your Majesty.' The vast crowd cheered the minister and appealed to the king to accept Padmavati. King Purushottama softly took the pretty fingers of the princess into his and both burst into tears. The Kanchi princess became the empress of Orissa. Her maiden name, Rupambika, was changed into Padmavati (the Lotus lady) by an adoring royal lover and an admiring nation.

Prataparudra, the Bhakta

King Prataparudra Deva was the issue of this romantic love and marriage. The beauteous Padmavati had undergone terrific mental and nervous suffering. She must have

been torn at times with spiritual convulsions during those years of suspense and misgiving. Added to these psychic disturbances, she surely brought also the influence the Tamil Alwar poet-saints must have exercised on a cultivated Tamil princess of those times.

All these she seems to have transmitted to her son Prataparudra Deva by way of heredity and also, maybe, by up-bringing. Prataparudra Deva was reputed to have been extraordinarily handsome, a natural heritage from both his parents. Like his father he seems to have been a scholar of high order also and a patron of poets and scholars. Quite a number of celebrated Sanskrit books are attributed to him. He was not a bad military commander also. But all his worthy qualities as a monarch were nullified by psychic and sentimental weaknesses and by the credulity of the Vaishnavic cult that he inherited, very probably, from his South-Indian mother. She was born and brought up in a city that was the major field of the activities of Ramanuja, the pioneer of the Bhakti cult. The consequences of the weaker side of this Orissa king were disastrous. In the six-year war between the Vijayanagar empire of Krishna Deva Raya and the Gajapati empire of Prataparudra, Orissa, hitherto conquering and invincible, lost almost every battle and ultimately the war, surrendering the whole of the Andhra Delta right up to the Krishna,—territory she had been ruling for centuries. As this unfortunate Orissa monarch's inmost urge in life seems to have been devotion to God, he was more a devotee than a good ruler or a glorious conqueror like his ancestors. Much against the protests of his wise ministers, the king submitted himself to the hypnotic influence of Chaitanya's personality and his sentimental cult, with tragic consequences to his people, his empire, even perhaps to himself.

CHAPTER X

THE AGE OF PURANAS AND ORNATE POETRY

THE BACKGROUND

Literature Goes to Feudal Courts

The last Hindu king of Orissa, Mukunda Deva, died heroically on the battlefield of Gohiritikra near Jajpur, in defence of his kingdom and motherland, in 1568, only three decades after the death of Chaitanya. For two centuries and a half thereafter, Orissa was a veritable cockpit of rival war-lords and marauders. It was successively overrun by Moghuls, Afgans and Marathas, but under no regime did the people have even one year of peace and security. It is a shocking tale of war, famine and plunder.

In the absence of a stable central power, the old Orissa kingdom broke up into innumerable little semi-independent principalities. Lacking any of the grand aspirations of the days of the Empire, these small chiefs generally warred among themselves, maintained harems and patronised literature as a pastime in order to have their names immortalised through the works of literary protégés. This association of feudalism with the literature of the land, which had been so far very fortunately absent, had a gravely adverse effect which we shall consider presently. The voluptuous courts found religious sanction for their bejewelled sensuality in the word-cult of *Gitagovinda* and decadent Sanskrit *kavyas* and the Krishna-Gopi cult of the Neo-Vaishnavites; and both influences have percolated into the national consciousness of Orissa, with disastrous consequences for the national character as well as national literature.

But not every poet and writer of this period was either a princeling or a royal pet. Quite a large number were just common citizens like Sarala Dasa and, as a matter of fact, were only carrying on that great peasant poet's tradition. This period was most fruitful in Puranas written on the model of Sarala's *Mahabharata* by these writers from the rank and file.

The spiritual and religious traditions created by the Pancha-sakhas were also continued by a small band, culminating in two picturesque personalities, Arakshita Dasa and Bhima Bhoi.

The religious fervour of Vaishnavism, or rather its Chaitanya variety, inspired a number of *kavyas* on episodes from the life of Rama and Krishna, mostly the latter. There was also an outburst of songs of Vaishnavic love and devotion that reached a fine climax in the thrilling lines of Gopalakrishna in the 19th century.

On the whole, the age did not produce anything new, but just expanded what had been started earlier. The Purana-makers had Sarala Dasa and the Pancha-sakhas as their models; the protagonists of ornate poetry developed the *chautisas*; and the metaphysicals continued the age-old Orissa tradition originated in the Buddhist psalms. Something distinctly different comes into our view only when we come to the late 19th century, about 50 years after the British occupation of Orissa. The three antecedent centuries may thus be taken as an expansion of the old literature, in various well-known categories.

There is, however, one man of genuine talent and originality who stands apart from all others, not belonging to any of these categories. He is Brajanatha Badajena, the author of *Samara-taranga* or Waves of War. He is in a class by himself in his own times, or rather he is a 'modern' born before his time.

Thus the literature of this period may be conveniently discussed under the following heads:

(1) The Puranas; (2) Ornate poetry—Upendra Bhanja; (3) Vaishnava poetry in the Ornate genre—Dinakrishna, Abhimanyu, Bhaktacharana, Yadumani, Deva Durlabha and Bhupati Pandita; (4) The Vaishnava songmakers—Kavisurya, Gopalakrishna, Banamali; (5) The metaphysicals —Arakhita Dasa and Bhima Bhoi; (6) Brajanatha Badajena; (7) Some important books of the period; and (8) Epilogue to the old period.

THE PURANAS

Mahadeva Dasa and Pitambara Dasa

Almost all the Sanskrit *Puranas* have been done into

Oriya and they were composed, for the most part, during this period. But quite a few are very recent in origin. Observing the great popularity of the Puranas among the masses, some unscrupulous modern printers and publishers have had these too recently translated from Sanskrit, Hindi or Bengali, keeping all the outward appearance of a medieval production. The Puranas, as a whole, constitute the largest and the finest mass-reading in Orissa. They are a great factor in the spontaneous acquisition of literacy among the Oriya peasantry, and they constitute also the most potent ethical inspiration in rural society. Written in the language of the masses and in simple easy-running metre, telling of gods and goddesses in terms of the men and women of rustic society, discussing the day-to-day problems of the common peasant through the mouths of gods and saints, and always bringing about in the end the triumph of virtue over evil, these Puranas continue to be a perennial source of education and entertainment to Orissa's simple folk both in towns and villages. To them the characters of the Puranas, though out of all proportion to reality, are more real, closer to their mental life, than any national hero. The very suspension of disbelief that the Puranic fantasies and excesses demand, generate in the peasant mind that spontaneous enthusiasm they sustain so well.

Three names stand out prominently in this period as popular creators of Purana literature in Orissa. They are Mahadeva Dasa, Pitambara Dasa and Krishnacharana Pattanayaka. Of these Mahadeva Dasa was the most prolific, for he wrote the *Markandeya Purana*, *Vishnu-kesari Purana*, *Padma Purana* as well as *Kartika Mahatmya*, *Vaisakha Mahatmya*, *Magha Mahatmya*, *Asadha Mahatmya*, *Dvadashi Mahatmya* and also *Niladri Mahodaya*. These are still widely popular among the rural masses of Orissa. Krishnacharana Pattanayaka's *Vamana Purana* and *Kalki Purana* are not so popular as Mahadeva's or Pitambara's works.

The Great Pitambara Dasa

Of all the Purana creators, Pitambara Dasa, author of only one Puranic epic, *Nrisinha Purana*, appears to be the most outstanding. This is entirely an original work. There is nothing

like this story in Sanskrit as far as has been ascertained by scholars in Orissa. It is not the well-known story of Hiranya Kasipu and Prahlada and the Lion-Avatar of Vishnu. In Oriya we get that story in the *Vishnu-kesari Purana* of Mahadeva Dasa and others. In the work of Pitambara Dasa we read of two brothers, Nrisimha and Sesha, incarnations respectively of Vishnu and his serpent Ananta. They are born to a pious Brahmin raja of Badrika named Krishna-vallabha, and fight and kill the two demon-brothers Mura and Daruna, who had terrorised Heaven and Earth. Like Hanumana in the *Ramayana*, Garuda plays here the part of the faithful servant of Vishnu and his heroic feats almost equal those of the monkey hero. As in the *Mahabharata*, so here we find the hard archery contest which the ambitious young nobleman must win, to obtain the hand of the beauteous Lakshmi, daughter of Varuna, king of the seas. Prince Nrisimha wins her at last, coming out victorious in the tournament. The poet apparently got the inspiration for this singular story from the site of Jagannatha, where Lakshmi's temple is at the back of the main shrine, and the sea, the paternal home of Lakshmi, only a quarter of a mile off.

On the whole, this *Nrisimha Purana* of Pitambara Dasa may be taken as a remarkable work. Added to the originality of the conception, the poet has so richly embellished the narration with imagination, character delineation and practical wisdom as to make the whole strikingly charming. His condemnations as well as his panegyrics of the other sex are equally enjoyable. Battles, the relation between the sexes and the preaching of social ethics, these three are the main elements of all Puranic stories, and they are found in Pitambara's book in good measure—particularly social ethics, with the intriguing insights of a keen, clever observer and a man of high imagination. The episodes of the youthful Menaka offering her charms to the sternly ascetic Suka, and of the egoistic Brahmin Manu, as also the allegory of Jiva (soul) and Parama (world-soul) are really unforgettable. In the long succession of battles between the Demon Mura and Nrisimha, the highly imaginative author introduces at one place on army of Amazons before whom both Nrisimha and his brother Sesha who had already tasted sex, were completely

powerless. Only Garuda, the total celibate, could vanquish them.

Readers might énjoy the allegorical story of Manu, the Brahmin, which the poet relates in the second book of his epic:

There was a Brahmin called Manu who, owing to his devotion to Vishnu, rose from poverty and obscurity to affluence and fame. In the words of the poet, 'there was not enough room in his house to accommodate the wealth that was flowing in.' He lived in a house of gold and ate from gold plates and his home was noisy with handsome sons and daughters. One day, however, while the Brahmin was walking in the dark, his feet accidentally fell on the neck of a new-born calf, which died instantly. The pious Brahmin then and there knelt down and prayed to Vishnu for redemption from the sin of killing a calf and thereafter nothing untoward, as might be apprehended, happened to him. The news of this miraculous redemption reached the ears of the gods in Heaven and they looked at one another in amazement that a sin could be committed without anybody suffering at all for it. Then Vishnu was taken ill, all on a sudden. He became emaciated and anaemic, for no reason whatsoever. At last Asvinikumara, the divine Doctor, diagnosed that the illness of Vishnu was due not to any pathological defect, but was a vicarious expiation on behalf of the cow-killing Brahmin. Vishnu thereupon disguised Himself as a poor Brahmin and came to meet Manu, the rich and pious Brahmin. They met and started talking. To every query of the disguised Vishnu, Manu replied: 'This is my house; this is my property; this is my wife; these are my children;' etc. Gradually leading the egoistic creature into a dilemma, Vishnu at last asked him: 'If all these are yours, how dare you foist your sin on somebody else?' Thereupon the disease that was in Vishnu descended onto the Brahmin.

In the very first 'Sea' (the poet designates each of his seven books a *ratnakara* or 'sea') the story of the Temptation of Suka, the ascetic, brings out the eternal Feminine in varied and colourful aspects through fine dramatic dialogues. Menaka the beauteous temptress offers her charms to the young Suka and taunts his manliness for not being affected

by her youth, beauty and the enchanting spring-time. To which the ascetic replies:

'This human body contains nothing but blood, bones, mucus, sinews, faecal matter and urine. This hateful mass of filth is merely dressed up in a covering of skin. Even knowing all this, people go mad for it, embracing it as "my woman" and grow enfeebled and devitalised, hungering for the genitals of each other. The foul flesh will soon putrefy. You may go home, for I do not care for this enjoyment.'

Pat came the Woman's reply:

'What nonsense, young man! See how sweet the nectar is that emanates from my body, which no young man can forbear. You condemn woman? But creation continues only because of her. Who is without a woman in this world? None indeed, because woman is the very fountain of joy on this earth. Like the goddess Lakshmi, woman is the saviour of the family and the main partner in the pious life of the householder. A householder is so called just because of a woman. The children and the grandchildren of householders become famous and prosperous only through her. Man becomes great through woman.... Woman is the very origin of this world. Who does not, therefore, embrace a woman? Pray do not condemn woman. How could you have come to life without one?'

To this the great ascetic gave a quiet reply, characteristic of his grand reputation. Said he:

'Listen, young lady, all you women are made of the same stuff, the same way. I was born of one such as you say. So you too are not different from my own mother. How can I desire to enjoy a body that is like my mother's?... To me all creatures appear just the same. I neither fear nor love anybody nor wish any harm. Indra had no business to send you down here to tempt me away from my yoga.'

In his seventh 'sea' the poet introduces a strange mysticism which is difficult to interpret. It is, however, only a small portion of a long philosophical lecture. Here is a sample:

'The field is being ploughed, but there are neither bullocks nor tiller. The daughter-in-law is not widowed in spite of

the son's death. The husker suffers from pneumonia and the winnowing fan has fever, the sieve goes to visit her father, leaving the house to be looked after by the broomstick! The stone is having a collapse, water is thirsty and the fire shivers with cold!'

Unlike many an Oriya author of the same period and class, Pitambara Dasa appears to have been quite a good Sanskrit scholar. His diction is chaste, expressions unambiguous and style elegant. There is nowhere in his writings the rough touch of the peasant that we find everywhere in Sarala's *Mahabharata*, though we also miss in him the pulsating life of the soil so characteristic of the great peasant poet.

It is sad that this extraordinarily talented man had to beg for his living. But he left a proud heritage of talent to his descendants. His son and grandson are also authors of repute in this period.

Ramayanas and Mahabharatas

As proof of the deep influence the twin epic tales of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* exercised on the mind of the Orissan people, we get in this period at least three *Mahabharatas* in different forms and about fifty versions of the *Ramayana*. There are at least three *Adhyatma-Ramayanas*, one of them by an Andhra, called Telenga Gopala. There are about half a dozen of the lyrical variety, to be sung and acted, the most celebrated being the *Bichitra-Ramayana* of Visvanatha Khuntia, a citizen of Puri, and *Nata-Ramayana* of Kesava Pattanayaka of Palur in the Ganjam district. Kesava's rendering makes an enchanting *yatra* and has the deep human touches of a true poet.

Of the *Mahabharatas*, the best known is the authenticated translation by Krishna Simha, the Raja of Dharakot, a principality in Ganjam District. Known all over Orissa as *Krishna Simha Mahabharata*, this work is only next in popularity to the vibrant epic of Sarala Dasa.

ORNATE OR COURTLY POETRY

Upendra Bhanja

As has already been said, ornate poetry in Oryia is the

direct product of Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda*. From it arose the ornate *chautisas*, which slowly evolved and expanded into ornate *kavyas*. The decadent Sanskrit classics of the 9th-10th centuries also had a good share in this evolution. Jayadeva's popular lyrical drama, firmly established two poetic ideals before aspirants to literary fame: one, that poetry should and could be sung; secondly, human sexual behaviour in youth is the only and the most fecund source on earth for poetic material. The decadent Sanskrit classics on the other hand, like *Naishadhiya-charitam* or *Sisupalavadha-kavyam* established a third ideal, namely, that mere verbal jugglery, sheer dictional tapestry and bombast should also be an integral part of poetry. Ornate Oriya poetry of this period has all these elements in abundance.

It is difficult to say with which particular writer started this composite fashion in Oriya poetry. As has been said before, experimental beginnings had been successfully undertaken by some of the unambitious and unpretentious *chautisa*-makers. They added the fire of music to versification. They also tried to impart fine rhythmic effect to verse by the sheer arrangement of letters and words, without caring much for clarity or precision of sense. The ornate *kavyas* and *mahakavyas*, or the *chitra-kavyas* as they are called in Sanskrit poetics, were just elaborations of these ballads with a story of a lad and a lass as the connecting thread. Oriya translations of the *Gita-govinda*, essentially a lad and a lass story, so abundant in Orissa, might also have shown the way for this type of poetry.

Within certain limits, the ornate poetry produces an excellent aesthetic impression. The clever manipulation of sound and sense does provide an elegant and acceptable intellectual pleasure. This type of poetry may be called linguistic jewellery; it tries to create the maximum aesthetic effect out of the raw materials of the common words in a language. If poetry may be taken as craftsmanship in words, so far as its physical aspect is concerned, then the enormous mass of medieval ornate poetry, not only in Oriya but in all other Indian languages, is not to be rejected outright, but may be accepted as possessing a sound literary right to existence. The trouble, however, is that this genre has abused this right by going to morbid, senseless excesses and by confusing a mere

style with the very art of poetry itself. Oriya ornate poetry of this period displays the usual virtues as well as the vices of this style in profusion, the latter far in excess of the former.

The *chautisa*-makers belonged mostly to the northern districts of Orissa. But strangely enough, the great protagonists of Oriya ornate poetry hail mostly from South Orissa, the Bhanjas of the ruling family of the long defunct principality of Ghumusar in South Orissa standing as symbolic of the entire school for all these centuries.

The Bhanjas are the best known and the most historic ruling race of Orissa. It has been rightly said by the late R.D. Bannerjee that while the ancestors of the famous Rajput clans were still nomads with painted bodies in the central Asian steppes, these Bhanjas were ruling over prosperous territories in eastern India. Even now they are to be found all over Orissa. But of them all the Bhanjas of Mayurbhanja and Ghumusar have become parts of the national life of the Oriyas, by their significant contributions to and patronage of arts and literature.

In the midst of murders, frauds, intrigues and unspeakable immoralities, the ruling Bhanjas of Ghumusar kept up a living tradition of literary culture in the family. Upendra Bhanja is merely the culmination of this tradition. Original in nothing, he just fulfils in a grandiloquent manner, the trends that had been started and carried on by his uncle and grandfather. Having eclipsed all else in the field by his success in this particular line, in a superb manner, Upendra Bhanja now stands as the archetype of ornate poetry in Orissa, casting his shadow down to modern times.

If we believe tradition and even his own words in his poems, which are to the effect that he obtained his poetic faculties through trantric or yogic practices, we may have no hesitation in saying that Upendra was not a spontaneous poet, but the dazzling product of labour and culture. But this may be, either a sort of poetic etiquette of those days or a way of advertising one's poetic wares through the pretension to supernatural sanction. There are proofs galore to show that Upendra was endowed with genuine poetic faculties to an enviable degree. But through a very very mistaken enthusiasm, the still small voice of the muse in this poet was deliberately smothered

under heaps of stupid pedantry in the name of poetry. Vast portions of his enormous output prove it. Not a page of most of his works is intelligible even to educated men without the help of glossaries and dictionaries. The achievement of the poet lies in concealing the commonplace in the shell of puns, alliterations and assonances and all the other difficult figures of speech known to any Indian literature, in order to make it appear uncommon and magnificent to the average reader. Upendra has entire cantos which, if we take out the first letters of the lines, will read in a different metre and mean a season different from the original set forth. If we take out the second letters the same canto will have still a different metre describing still another season. His *Baidehisha-vilasa*, in imitation of the *Raghunatha-vilasa* by his uncle Dhananjaya Bhanja, is the *Ramayana* in ornate versification. This book may be taken as the supreme example of a *Chitra-kavya*. In consonance with the title of the book that begins with 'ba', each line of this enormous epic begins with 'ba.' Not only that, the number of stanzas in each canto are figures that have 'ba' as an initial when pronounced. The book is supposed to have been finished also in *baramasa* (twelve months) in keeping with the 'ba' formula. A familiar stanza from this ornate epic, translated into plain English, but with just the semblance of the 'b'—formula, may read as follows:

Bereft of hearing I am not
Boat-man replied to Rama,
"By the way, you've turned stone into a lady, I have heard;
Believe me, if that happens to this craft of mine through the touch of your feet,
By what else shall this poor man earn his daily bread?*

* To those few zealous but entirely mistaken Oriyas who believe and preach *ad nauseum* that nothing like these exists in any other language or, worse still, that mere crude dictional gymnastics such as these are alone the very acme of poetry, these two extracts, one from *A History of Sanskrit Literature* and the other from a P.E.N. publication on Telegu literature may bring some much-needed enlightenment:

'There are other types of works which are only exercises in versification and word-construction. Maruganti Srinagaracharya's *Dasaratharajanandan-charitam*. also called *Nirliptaramayanam*, is a work eschewing all labials. Word-construction developed in this direction so far that some poets used only one letter. And metrical feats like *bandhakavitvam* and *garbhakavitvam* were performed by poets of the sixteenth century also. But this was carried to excess later. In *bandhakavitvam*,

It has to be admitted, however, that, in spite of all artificialities and all the pretentious pendantries, Upendra sweeps his readers off their feet by the deep subtle rhythm of his lines, by his superb metrical success and last, but not the least in importance, by the enchanted world of love, beauty and youth into which he ushers his readers or audience the moment his lines are sung or read. Unrivalled in the power of manipulating words most dexterously according to their own laws of beauty, unmatched in the art of painting sensuous, youthful love and unique in the total grand music of his lines, Upendra Bhanja dominates Oriya poetry with an influence that has been almost totalitarian for nearly two centuries. Rightly did Pandit Gopabandhu Dasa, as a young poet, sing of Upendra:

Oh Upendra,
The Pandits recite your lines at courts,
Gay travellers on the road,
The peasants in the fields and ladies in the harems,
And the courtesans too, while they dance.

There is plenty of evidence, scattered at rare intervals in the immensity of his conventionalities, that Upendra Bhanja was supremely gifted also to express natural human yearning with the most touching simplicity. The enchanting love-letter of the young hero of his poem *Premasudhanidhi* to his royal sweetheart is a fine example. There are few educated Oriyas to whom at least the first few stanzas of this beautiful

verses are fitted into figures. For instance, if a verse is to be fitted into a circle with diagonals, at the centre a letter should be used which would be common for several feet. In *garbhakaritvam*, one verse contains another of a different type. All these have no poetical value and are mostly written during the close of the seventeenth and during the eighteenth and nineteenth centries.'—P. T. Raju, *Telegu Literature*, pp. 43.

'Bharavi is guilty of errors of taste from which Kalidas is free. Especially in Canto XV he sets himself to try *tours de force* of the most foolish kind, redolent of the excess of the Alexandrian poets. Thus one verse has the first and third and the second and fourth lines identical, in another all four are identical; one has practically only C, another only the letters S, C, Y and L, in other stanzas each line reads backwards the same way as the next; or the whole stanza read backwards gives the next; one stanza has three senses, two no labial letters; or each verse can be read backwards and forwards unchanged.'—A. B. Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 114.

The great English scholar makes similar remarks in respect of the poet Magha also, though he reveals himself an admirer of these great Sanskrit poets in regard to their other worthy aspects.

love-lyric in Sankarabharana metre do not occur spontaneously when the bright autumn moon of Asvin fills this sordid earth with the romantic, fairyland atmosphere, re-created in this beautiful lyric. So also are the cantos in his most popular kavya, *Labanyavati*, that describe the flower-woman, the magician and the honeymoon of the lovers.

This *kavya*, *Labanyavati*, is not only typical of all the *kavyas* of Upendra, but also of the entire ornate poetry in Oriya of this period. The pattern is painfully monotonous. The difference of Upendra's success consists, not in any originality of conception but in the skill of execution. He outstrips all others in word manipulation, in the description of voluptuous, fleshly, warm sex-love, as also in the mastery of all existing metres in the Oriya language. With all these elements in full bloom, *Labanyavati* is undoubtedly an ornate *kavya par excellence*, providing the typical pattern. An outline of its development may be of interest to the readers:

As the result of a misdemeanour, a couple in Heaven are born into this world of ours. The woman is born a princess of Ceylon (Simhala)* and the man the heir-apparent of the kingdom of Karnataka. The prince and the princess become prince Chandrabhanu the hero, and Labanyavati, the lovely, love-sick heroine. The first few chapters are devoted to childhood and pre-adolescence and to the development of the heroine as a woman. Then there are talks of her marriage. A *sannyasi* visits courts with the picture of this princess. Chandrabhanu falls in love with Labanyavati at the sight of her portrait. Labanyavati and Chandrabhanu meet and exchange keepsakes in a dream and thereafter keep on repining one for the other. Then through the good offices of the *sannyasi*, letters are exchanged between the love-lorn pair. Yearning to see each other in flesh and blood, they secretly meet in the famous temple of Rameswaram, and the parents, finding the match quite desirable, unite the young lovers in wedlock. This now introduces in the poem descriptions of the warm, romantic experiences of the first taste of sex in youth. Then, called for action to quell marauders, Chandra-

* Strangely enough, an illustrated palm-leaf manuscript of *Labanyavati* in Oriya script was found in Ceylon, the homeland of the heroine, some years ago.

bhanu stays away from his young wife for about a year. This brings in descriptions of seasons of the year, with erotic and sentimental reactions on the part of the separated lovers. At last the two pining souls are reunited. Chandrabhanu and Labanyavati are crowned king and queen of Karnataka and everything ends happily.

In all the other ornate *Kavyas* by Upendra and hundreds of others of this class we find this same story with a change of names for the heroes and the heroines. The theme is treated in the very same pattern. The genre is unashamedly monotonous.

Upendra is credited with nearly 70 to 80 books, quite a good number of which are still unpublished. Besides *Labanya-vati* and *Baidehisha-vilasa*, other books that are widely known, though neither read nor understood in general, are *Prema-sudhanidhi* (Container of the nectar of love) and *Kotibrahmanda-sundari* (Beauty of million worlds).

Ever since the modern period started in the middle of the last century, this great medieval poet has been the centre of stormy literary controversies in Oriya. While traditionalists have upheld him as the most splendid specimen of poetic art in Orissa, the modernists have condemned him as a mere pedant, obsessed with puerile word-games and adolescent sex-sickness. In the last decade of the last century the controversy came to such a pitch that the opposite groups brought out two rival magazines—*Indradhanu* (The Rainbow) and *Bijuli* (The Lightning)—to abuse each other to their hearts' content. The battle for Upendra Bhanja continues unabated even now in the bellicose pamphlets and dramas organised by Kalinga Bharati, an institution founded by the late Shri Bichhanda Charana Patnaik.

Modern prudes, on the other hand, should not forget that Upendra's sex-obsession or his description of human erotic behaviour, is nothing compared to that placed before the eyes of the whole contemporary civilised world in the famous novels of Zola or D. H. Lawrence. As to his obsession with verbal jugglery, he is not alone in this game either, but merely one of a whole host of Indian writers in Sanskrit as well as other Indian languages. But Upendra may be taken as the most supreme master in this line of *sabdalankara* (a recognised and

respected element in literary art in Indian poetics) in the whole of Indian literature. He has successfully tried all the tricks of a *chitrakavya* of Sanskrit poetics, throwing out poems in labials or dentals alone or ones completely excluding them, and demonstrating all sorts of *bandhas* or mazy word-puzzles. Besides the *Baidehisha-vilasa*, the Rama story in bejewelled verses already referred to, he has narrated the story again in *Abanna Rasataranga* (Rasa-waves in single letters). The entire story is told with only uncombined (*abana*) vowels and consonants.

And it has to be emphasized again that Upendra was not a mere virtuoso. He is the only poet in the old Oriya literature who took to poetry as a mission in life. He not only wrote as he understood poetry to be or as his contemporary world demanded, but he took deliberate pains to perpetuate his style of poetry in Oriya. He has tried to popularise the *kavya*-poetics in his *Rasapanchaka* (in verse), narrating the types of heroes and heroines to be dealt with and their typical situations. For the dictional felicity of young aspirants he has left behind also a dictionary in verse, *Gitabhidhana*, written in order to help them in rhyming.

This is, in his own words, what the poet thought his poetical ideal to be, as given in his two popular works *Labanyavati* and *Rasikaharavali*. In one he says:

> I want to compose a poem in nice varied metres
> Wherein Sringar, the best of sentiments, will be displayed,
> And will be a work of imagination based on experience;
> I therefore appeal to the virtuous to listen to this with sympathy.

And in the other says he

> This delicate poetry, I conceive as an image
> That must have embellishments for beautification,
> And shall enchant common people's hearts by the simple music of its feet,
> And shall give pleasure to eminent scholars too, with the excellence of its significance.

That being the poet's accepted literary credo, we have no right to judge him and his work by our modern standards.

Again, viewed in proper perspective, his entire attitude to sex also appears nothing more than the apotheosis of the eternal Feminine and admiration for the Body Beautiful. We have no reason now to turn up our noses when he says: "He is bereft of vision indeed, in spite of eyes, who has not seen the Lady divested of her garments;" or when the love-sick hero of his *Premasudhanidhi* muses in the following manner:

'Can he, who has not offered lamps to gods in the holy month of Kartika, or has not had purificatory baths at Prayaga in the month of cold Magha, hope to have a pretty woman in the fullness of light, or to sit with one on his lap in moonlight? Maybe, it is only if one has worshipped Shiva sincerely in his previous life, that one can hope to hold in his hands the auspicious coconuts of a pretty woman's breasts!'

—we, who are so familiar with modern nude sculpture and paintings and all the immense pornographic literature, and who pass by in silent enjoyment such lines in great Kalidasa as: 'Can he, who has had already a taste, draw himself willingly away from a lady with her thighs disrobed?'

We have to bear in mind again that he was a prince, and, moving among handsome men and beautiful ladies, had a natural tendency to sing of their habits and charms. Tradition has it that the poet himself passed a life of idyllic happiness, married to a beautiful and cultured princess of a neighbouring state. The innumerable love songs and descriptions of warm love from the poet's pen are not perhaps mere conventional displays, but seem to bear the deep impress of personal experience. The ringing pathos and sincere yearning of lines such as those quoted below cannot fail to drive home to any reader the deep worship of Woman that the poet entertained in his heart, as well as his gift of rendering primary feelings of the human heart in the natural manner of great poets.

Remember, Darling, that time when it was heavily raining
From a darkened sky which flashed with lightning,

And how, with the howling of the winds was mingled,
The croak of frogs and the cry of the peafowl?

It was midnight,
And the winds wafted into our chamber the scent of the *neepa* flowers.
That time, delighting me with many a charm of yours
Do you, honey, remember, how you made me pledge
Not ever to be away from you?

But separated now, poor Upendra just muses over those joys,
And feels impotent in his plight.

In another place the poet puts the ideal of human happiness in unambiguous words:

He indeed is happy, who is not the servant of a king,
But is a man of scholarship, and blessed with a charming spouse.
What avails a man even the possession of wealth untold?
There is no more cursed soul than he who is without the company of a good woman!

The Song-maker

This side of the poet's genius, this inherent capacity of his to express natural feelings in a natural manner with immediate appeal to our hearts is, however, best shown in his songs. As a matter of fact, Upendra may safely be taken as the pioneer song-maker in Orissa. Describing the common sentiments of young lovers in excellent tunes and compositions, these Upendra songs are still widely sung and enjoyed all over Orissa.

With all his splendid achievements the poet appears to have been a man of sincere humility. In the first canto of *Baidehisha-vilasa* he mentions Valmiki, Kalidasa and Balarama Dasa as his great predecessors and tries to justify his fresh effort by likening it to the humble light of the fire-flies which has its place in this world, in spite of the existence of the sun, the moon and the stars. At the end of each book and almost in each canto, he offers a prayer for the success of his literary effort. In the *Premasudhanidhi* he says:

'Oh Lord, thou Ocean of Compassion, have mercy on me. Let this poem *Premasudhanidhi* of mine attain fame. May

this poetic essay of three hundred and forty-five stanzas, reside in the hearts of all good men.'

His deep spirituality also has found magnificent expression in the lines of *Baidehisha-vilasa* where the boatman refuses to ferry Rama across the Ganga without first washing His feet —lest, by the touch of the dust of His feet, the boat turn into a lady as had just happened to the Ahalya-stone. Says the poet:

'The Feet, to wash which Brahma is ever eager, but never gets the chance, and Siva is sad at not getting a little of the washing water, were bathed by the ignorant boatman, just to declare perhaps to the whole world that the Lord is indeed the Saviour of the down-trodden (*patitapavana*).'

In recent times the poet's life has been successfully dramatised on the Orissa stage by more than one playwright. Dance-dramas based on *Labanyavati* and other *kavyas* of his have turned out to be very effective. For two centuries Upendra Bhanja has been also the main stock-in-trade of the wandering 'palawalas' of Orissa, who keep audiences spell-bound by the exposition of Upendra's extraordinarily clever manipulation of words, and display the grand rhythm of his lines by full-throated singing, revealing the enchanting world of romance which Upendra's poetry generally evokes.

VAISHNAVA POETS IN THE ORNATE GENRE

The cultivation of literature as part of a family's tradition and culture was not singular in Orissa to the royal Bhanjas of Ghumusar during this period. It appears now to have become really national in depth and extent. The main poetic inspiration and impetus seem to have emanated from Vaishnavism which, with the twin forces of Jagannatha Dasa's *Bhagavata* and the spread of the Chaitanya cult, had practically permeated all strata of society from prince to peasant. Many rajas and ranis now aspired to poetic immortality, and poetic talent among the common people also started developing all around. Taken together, these comrades-in-letters have left behind an immense number of *kavyas*, *gitas*, *samhitas* and

other miscellaneous works, of which a large number still lies buried and scattered in the innumerable village libraries of palm-leaf manuscripts. The extent of this poetic culture can be imagined when we learn that in the family of the lady-poet Brindabati Dasi of this period, her father, husband, son and grandson were also poets and all have left behind books in verse on the Krishna cult, the family religion.

This poetic mass production generally consists of episodes from the lives of Krishna and Rama, more from the former's. Three main situations in Krishna's life predominate: his *lila* at Brindabana with the cowherd boys and girls, his exodus to Mathura, and his kingship at Dwaraka. In and through these external motifs there is the strong undercurrent of a metaphysical interpretation of *Rasalila* and other aspects of the Bhakti cult.

Of the Ramaites of this period, and that too in the ornate genre, Upendra Bhanja stands head and shoulders above the others. Of the Krishnaites the following are the most outstanding among a whole host: Dinakrishna Dasa, Abhimanyu Samanta Simhara, and Bhakta Charana Dasa, all great advocates of the Krishna cult and great poets too in the ornate style.

Dinakrishna Dasa

There has been much controversy as to whether there was one Dinakrishna Dasa or two or more. It appears safest to accept Prof. Artavallabha Mohanty's view that the Dinakrishna Dasa of the enchanting *Rasakallola* and the appealing *Artatrana chautisa* was one and the same and that he was a citizen of Puri who passed through terrible sufferings. He seems to have been poor, but unbending in his opinions and attitudes. He contracted leprosy in middle life and there was no end to his misery. Yet, with astounding devotion to his Lord and to poetry in spite of a fell disease and poverty, he has left behind more than a dozen works, at least six of which are widely popular in Orissa even today. That the poet was not lucky enough to get due appreciation for his works in his lifetime and felt terribly frustrated by his hard struggle for a living, is clearly reflected in the following tell-tale colophon of the sixteenth canto of his *Rasakallola*.

Nobody's heart really melts, their sympathies being merely apparent
Like the lotus in water.
They cover themselves with marks of piety,
But who knows their sins inside,
As they present themselves like paintings?
Oh Lord, why did you make Dinakrishna so cursed
That he has only a tale of painful woes to narrate?
That a poet has to flatter nincompoops
Is the worst of miseries—
Were it not better to pierce one's breast with a dagger?

In the *Rasakallola*, his *magnum opus*, the poet carries the 'ka' initial throughout the book as Upendra Bhanja had successfully carried on the 'ba' initial in the *Baidehisha-vilasa*. But unlike the latter, Dasa's ornate work on Krishna's doings at Brindabana and Mathura is a far simpler and sweeter composition. It is uniformly musical all through, with soft, mellifluous diction and a masterly handling of the metres with alliterative and rhythmic cadences. The book is really popular for this reason. The poet's description of Krishna's doings at Brindabana, however, shows clearly that in his conception of love he was incapable of rising much above the physical plane, and to that extent does incalculable damage to the character of his own Master. Many of his other books on little incidents of Krishna's life are also of the same standard, meretricious rather than genuinely beautiful, always leading readers to the blind alley of sexual vulgarities, mistaking them to be parts of a spiritual cult. His *Artatrana chautisa*, supposed to have been daily recited by him before Jagannatha is, however, a real human document, reflecting the poet's own spiritual and physical suffering and gaining universal appeal through the intensity of his agony and the sincerity of a spontaneous human cry.

Abhimanyu Samanta Simhara

This poet belonged to a family of Kshatriyas from Rohilkhand, U.P., who had long been residing in Orissa. The family, with its aristocratic traditions and its estates, still exists at Balia, an interior village in the district of Cuttack. Born in 1757, the poet died in 1807, four years after the British

occupation of Orissa. He had a thorough schooling in the knowledge of those days under a very able man, the distinguished poet and scholar Sadananda Kavisurya[1] who initiated his brilliant disciple not only into the arts of versification, but also into the vast Vaishnavic lore. Combining both types of knowledge in his effort to build a fitting literary temple to his Lord, the poet has left to posterity a structure of exquisite lyrical beauty as well as barbaric arabesque.

It is clear from his early writings that but for the misleading Vaishnavic influence with its deified sex-immorality derived from his poet-teacher, our poet might have produced something virile, warm with the living touch of our day-to-day existence, as did Brajanatha Badajena who was almost a contemporary of his—because the poet's juvenalia, such as the *Bagha gita* (Ballad of a tiger hunt) or the *Chadhai gita* (Ballad of bulbul fights) are indeed unique in the whole of Oriya literature for their stark, intriguing realism as well as spectacular action.

In the *Bagha gita*, for instance, we not only get a very warm description of a shikar, but also pleasant personal glimpses of the poet's family. In the whole episode, the personality of one Yugala Gadanayaka, perhaps the head sepoy in the poet's aristocratic household, initiating, arranging and finalising the whole hunt and making his appearance at each crisis to help others out of it, is of tantalising interest. In this poem, the young poet speaks also in high praise of the many virtues of his father Indrajita Samanta who led the hunt. And the poet, not only in this but in all his religious works also, styles himself as Bira Abhimanyu (Abhimanyu, the fighter) always conscious of his proud Kshatriya and royal blood. Alas, if only he had followed the instincts of his class and his blood, instead of falling into the rut of Vaishnavic rigmarole as a means of 'salvation'!

Bidagdha chintamani, the *magnum opus* of the poet, reveals at its best and worst the qualities of ornate poetry as well as the virtues and vices of popular Vaishnavism. It is a great pity that this genuine poet was misguided into pedantic displays under the influence of Upendra Bhanja and his school.

[1] Mentioned in Chapter VIII in connection with the *chautisas*.

His narration of a story as rich in natural human feeling as that of Krishna—into some incidents of which the poet blows heavenly fire and music—creates the keener regret for what the language has lost by a misapplication of his talents to mere linguistic stupidities. And while we get sublime flashes of his vision of Divine Love, his acquiescence in a crude, vulgar, popular conception of the Radha-Krishna episodes brings his golden images down to the earthly mire of physical sexuality. So this *Bidagdha chintamani*, almost the vade-mecum of the Oriya Vaishnavas, appears to the objective critics of the present time a superb achievement as a work of art, mixed up with most regrettable shortcomings!

The book and its poet have all along been held in high esteem because the small amount of the genuine poetic content that we meet within its covers is of exceedingly high quality, both in sentiment and in the exquisite alliance of sound and sense. A delight to recite or sing, these *chhandas* of *Bidagdha chintamani* set the hearts of hearers afire with the deep nostalgic emotion natural to youth, mingled with a purifying touch of sublimity that lifts the audience into a region of ecstatic, spiritual Love. There is no Oriya lady who can restrain tears as the wandering minstrel intones the *chhandas* of *Bidagdha chintamani* describing Radha's sad musings over the seemingly impossible and unattainable love of Krishna, or the motherly concern of Yasoda over Krishna's delay to return from the forest with the cows. For the deep and sublime pathos in his poetry and the exquisite musicality of his lines, Abhimanyu may justly be described as the Swinburne of Oriya literature.

Unfortunately, these beautiful portions of this great book are so intimately linked with the true idiom of Oriya, so tuned with the tongue's natural alliterations, and so simple in the primal feelings of the human soul, that they defy translation. Rendered in another tongue the sentiments and the imagery may not appear very different from a similar content in Vaishnavic poetry in Sanskrit or other Indian languages, but the exquisite craftsmanship of Samanta Simhara that has infused stirring qualities of beauty, truth and deathlessness into those commonplaces, making Oriya appear as soft, as liquid, or as musical as any other langu-

age, must elicit wonder and admiration from any unbiased critic.

The great Vaishnavic poet begins this masterpiece, *Bidagdha chintamani*, with salutations to his Lord Krishna, who with Radha, is the embodiment of supra-physical Divine Love and who descends onto this earth only to 'make the Unmanifest manifest'. The whole book is supposed to be a planned argument of that Divine consummation. And there are indeed chapters and passages in the book that do give the readers a few touches of the beatific quality of Love. I must leave the readers with the following few lines from the 32nd canto of this book, where the poet presents us with the very quintessence of earthly love:

> The soul gifts itself away to one it finds worthy
> And the more unapproachable he is, the greater becomes the attraction,
> The greater the secrecy, the more violent the tide of infatuation,
> And the greater the impediment, the more the determination;
> But love looks really beauteous
> In the measure of its decency and modesty.

Bhaktacharana Dasa

Bhaktacharana Dasa is not an inspired poet but like Matthew Arnold of English letters, he has established himself in the cultural world of the Oriyas by his philosophy and wisdom expressed, not in the irrepressibe outpourings of the restless heart of a genius, but in the suave, elegant lines of a thinker and scholar.

We have already referred to his universally popular *Manabodha chautisa* in the section on *chautisas*. His *Mathuramangala* is equally famous and as widely read as a *kavya*.

The subject of the *Mathuramangala* is again commonplace. It is the old story of Krishna's exodus to Mathura where he kills the tyrant Kamsa. The romantic element is provided in the bewailings of the ladies of Brindabana on the eve of Krishna's departure and their still greater remorse when he fails to return to his former village. Too many books and

too many authors in Oriya have worn the theme threadbare, trying to be novel only in verbal and metrical artisanship or overloading the simple facts of a pastoral legend with metaphysical plaster. Amidst them Bhaktacharana gives an unmistakably individual stamp to his *Mathuramangala*, though on the whole the performance is far from brilliant, nor does it show any originality. The wailings of the Gopis on the eve of Krishna's departure and at their separation from him, are just elegant conventionalities, but better painted here than in most other *kavyas* of this class and hence oftener recited.

The crowning merit of the book lies in the two cantos describing the argumentation between Krishna's messenger Uddhava and the disconsolate Gopis. While the diplomatic messenger tries to explain away the ladies' grief with Vedantic Brahmavada as trivialities of earthly joys and sorrows, the simple, unsophisticated cowherd women pooh-pooh such irrelevant philosophy and demand their own Krishna, symbolising all the pleasant-unpleasant experiences of their deeply emotional personal relationship with him. The poet has tried to establish here the superiority of devotion (*bhakti*) to knowledge (*jnana*) as the means of realising God. And these arguments, enriched as they are with the poet's personal experience and his facile handling of the metre and diction, lose all the dryness of theological polemics and make dull philosophy as appealing as Love.

Bhaktacharana's *math* still exists at Raj-Sunakhala in the district of Puri where he settled in the afternoon of his life after long wanderings.

Yadumani Mahapatra

Best known as a wit in Orissa, like Birbal in northern India, Yadumani Mahapatra is the most entertaining literary legend in the land. In gatherings of rural folk in any part of Orissa, the witty sayings and practical jokes of Yadumani are frequently recalled for the innocent laughter and diversion they provide. His witticisms and jokes have been collected in *Yadumani-rahasya*, which is a perennial best-seller in rural areas. For the delectation of non-Oriya readers we give here just two samples of his practical jokes and ready repartee.

Once young Yadumani, not yet famous as he later became, visited Puri and sought shelter in the house of a priest of the Jagannatha Temple. The priest instructed his young wife to look after the visitor for the night and went to the temple to attend to his duties. But somehow the lady either completely forgot all about the guest or deliberately cold-shouldered him. Yadumani lay in the darkness of the entrance hall, hungry and weary. Hour after hour passed but no one called him for dinner, although he heard movements and talk inside. Yadumani therefore tried to sleep, planning vengeance. Round about midnight the priest returned and knocked. Yadumani deliberately pretended to be asleep and only opened the door after prolonged shoutings from the master of the house. When questioned by the priest as to his strange behaviour, Yadumani told him that the whole evening he had been opening the door off and on to visitors, each one of whom had declared himself to be the priest and the master of the house. They all went inside, but how they went out he did not know. Hence, when he, the real priest came, he was trying to find out whether this midnight visitor was the real master or yet another pretender.

That was enough to make the priest explode in anger and suspicion against the mistress of his home. Taking up a cudgel he ran inside and Yadumani quietly left the house.

Once the Rajas of Khandapara and Nayagara were travelling in the same direction with their retinues, but by two different paths, one high up along a hill and the other along its foot. Yadumani was in the retinue on the lower road. The situation became the object of a joke among the followers of the rival Raja higher up. They said the position of the roads taken by the respective princes proved conclusively who was the greater. This reached the ears of the retinue travelling below. All looked to Yadumani for a fitting rejoinder. And he cried out to the party of the Raja above, in a ringing couplet—

Ye fools, in the scales that measure and weigh,
Isn't it the bigger that goes low?

But how does such wit, readers may ask, come into the

picture of *kavya-makers*? The fact is, though a low-born carpenter, Yadumani was a finished scholar in Oriya and Sanskrit, proving, by the way, the width and depth of social culture in Orissa at that time. He has left behind a *kavya* with the title of *Prabandha-purnachandra* (Full moon of poetic essays), narrating the episode of Krishna's marriage with Rukmini, with extraordinary skill in word-play, word-painting and metrical handling. He has indeed out-Bhanjaed Upendra Bhanja at his own game. Like Bhanja's poems and songs the *Prabandha-purnachandra* of Yadumani is also a favourite source book of the Palawalas, the wandering exponents of ancient poetry in Orissa villages.

Because of his wit, scholarship and other excellent social qualities, Yadumani was a favourite courtier at many courts in the ex-states areas of Orissa. He was born in the village Itamati in the Nayagara state where his descendants are still living.

Two Recently Discovered Celebrities: Devadurlabha Dasa and Bhupati Pandit

Among the innumerable Dasas, Pattanayakas, princes and peasants who wrote in this period and have left behind a vast amount of conventional poetry, a good part of which is still unprinted, few indeed beyond the half-dozen whom we have already discussed need be introduced to readers outside Orissa. They are just camp-followers of the celebrated leaders, enjoying local celebrity or having mere chronological importance. In recent years, however, exploration of the heaps of palm-leaf manuscripts has been earnestly taken up, thanks to the pioneering adventure undertaken in this direction by Prof. Artavallabha Mohanty about 30 years ago. The Prachi Samiti he founded for this purpose has unearthed some important works and published with proper editing some others whose texts were vitiated by the stupidities of ignorant printers and publishers.

Two of the important finds of Prof. Artavallabha Mohanty are Devadurlabha Dasa, author of *Rahasya-manjari* and Bhupati Pandit, author of *Prema-panchamrita*.

Free of Vaishnavic bias, there should be no reason for any critic worth his salt to go into ecstacies over either of these two works and declare it 'great' as does Prof. Mohanty, a pious

Vaishnava himself. They are no more than ruminations over the Radha-Krishna-Gopi behaviour so familiar in medieval literature all over India. Both books are mainly religious rather than literary in motive and character. The *Rahasya* (mystery) of *Rahasya-manjari* and the *Panchamrita* (five nectars) of *Prema-panchamrita*, are more sectarian theology than unalloyed poetry, but that each of these two books bears the mark of individual workmanship, makes them really outstanding among a mass of nondescripts.

Rahasya-manjari contains some fine metrical experiments in Oriya, in imitation of Braja-boli, the classical language of the Vaishnavas. And the peroration is indeed remarkable, showing the poet as a great propagandist of peace and non-violence and an honest, pious citizen living in terror of the contemporary hooligans in power. It has surprising application to modern conditions, and it is hoped readers will not hesitate to pay the homage that is due to this unknown Oriya poet who anticipated Gandhi by so many centuries. Says he:

> If all of us developed the sense of goodness
> Would there be any need for swords and cannon and arrows?
>
> Drunken with their egos, nobody cares to understand another
> And so all of them perish, cutting each other's throat.
>
> These boors care not for equity but prize misdemeanour,
> And soaked in pride and illusions of all sorts,
> They try to strike terror in the hearts of the onlookers.
>
> How can I call them 'great' in any way?
> Afraid to speak out the Truth, and miserable if I don't,
> I feel this world is coming to an end.
> Deliver me, my Lord, from these perilous times,
> Bring me into the society of those that are really noble and high.

The poet justifies his poetic composition in a clever manner:

> This *Rahasya-manjari* is full of varied *rasas*
> Which only the discerning can properly appreciate.

The ignorant might query where was it before
Or why did it not appear before, if it was there?

If books could finish singing of Him,
Whose virtues are limitless according to the *sastras*,
Can that story be finalised, even if narrated again and
again for aeons?

Bhupati Pandit's *Prema-panchamrita* is an unpretentious *kavya* describing the *Rasalila* and giving his interpretations of it. It is written in the familiar *Bhagavata* metre that Jagannatha Dasa had already made famous and popular, and in a chaste, elegant language most remarkable for an Uttar-Pradesh Saraswata Brahmin who had come on a pilgrimage to Puri and stayed on at the court of the then Raja of Orissa. There is nothing in the style to show that the author's mother-tongue was not Oriya. The idioms of the Oriya language come to him with surprising naturalness. On the whole this *Prema-panchamrita* by a non-Oriya upcountry Brahmin appears to be the least gross and vitiated of all the accounts of Radha-Krishna-Gopi *lila* in Oriya. That gives the book its most distinguishing quality without which it would not have deserved even a mention in a book like this.

THE VAISHNAVA SONGMAKERS

In the second half of the 18th century there was an outburst of song in Orissa centering round the cult and romance of Radha and Krishna. The fact that all the major poets in this field belong to the southern part of Orissa might suggest some south Indian influence and inspiration; but it has now been conclusively proved, by musical experts from outside Orissa, that there is a distinct style of Orissan music which though stemming from the two well-known styles of Hindusthani and Karnatic, has combined both, for the creation of a peculiarly indigenous pattern.

The three famous song-makers whom we will now discuss were not composers in the ordinary sense, but real poets who found song the most suitable vehicle for the deliverance of their lyrical moods. Of the three, Kavisurya Baladeva Ratha appears to be the most musical in the technical sense,

apart from other literary qualities; Gopalakrishna the most poetical; and Banamali the most devotional. We shall begin with Baladeva, the eldest of the trio.

Kavisurya Baladeva Ratha

This great musical poet is generally known in Orissa as Kavisurya (the sun among poets), a title conferred on him by an admiring Raja of southern Orissa. He was handsome and possessed the excellent social qualities of a singer and wit. He was an extraordinary linguist—a finished scholar in Sanskrit and master of at least five other Indian languages. With these rare qualities he was not only in great demand at the many feudal courts of southern Orissa as a court poet, but was also engaged by British collectors as Dewan of large estates and as trusted guardian tutor of minor chiefs. With large land-grants from among admiring royal patrons and incomes from the various posts of trust he held, the poet lived a prosperous, successful and famous life, unlike most others of his tribe in Orissa. Born in 1789 in south Orissa, he died in 1845.

Kavisurya has left behind songs that cover about 500 demy size pages in print. The majority are love songs, centering round Radha and Krishna. Some at least out of them are most appealing in their warm personal experiences and reflections. He wrote some excellent satires also as rejoinders to the effrontery of unimaginative bureaucrats whose myopic vision failed to realise the difference in stature between the artificially glorified nonentities they were, and the genius they ill-treated. Here are two stanzas from a lampoon he aimed at one such, bringing to our mind the one in which Firdausi tore Mahmud of Gazni to pieces, as the latter failed to fulfil his promises of gifts to the great poet.

Can any wretched acquatic plant pretend to compete
with the lotus in full bloom?
Or can the village pig however well-nurtured be converted into a *Kamadhenu*[1]?
And however euphemistically described

[1] *Kamadhenu*—All-wish-fulfilling Cow, a legendary conception in Indian literature familiar to every Indian, educated or illiterate.

Can iron ever be gold, in spite of repeated temperings
and enamellings? (refrain)
A crow cannot speak God's name like a parrot, though
put in a cage,
A cat cannot make people think him a lion cub by just
standing inside a den,
And however euphemistically described
Iron can never be gold, in spite of repeated temperings
and enamellings!

The 'Champu' of Oriya Literature

Kavisurya's *magnum opus* is a slender book of 34 lyrics, a *chautisa*, representing the 34 letters of the alphabet from 'ka' to 'ksha'. Each song is written with the initial of a particular letter in each line and the lines arranged consecutively one after another. But this conventionality is never felt amidst the rushing tide of passion of the romantic hero and heroine and their touching expectations and despairs, in the panorama of imagery and the dexterous manipulation of rhythmic diction, and above all in the entertaining tune that each song provides, so adequately suited to the mood and the occasion. The restrictions, on the contrary, seem to have given added zest to this genius, and turned each individual song into an exquisite miniature painting. The whole, though small in size, seems to be excellently planned and worked out under the spell of one unbroken poetic frenzy, the mother of all great works in art and literature. There are few poems in Oriya so compactly composed and so well-built. Its high poetic and literary value has indeed made it immortal in literature, and loved by all in Orissa.

Therefore is this book *Kishorachandrananda champu* unique in Oriya literature. It is the only genuine *champu* (i.e. prose and poetry combined, according to Sanskrit poetics) in Oriya, and so becomes *the champu* for all Oriyas—though there are half a dozen others, old and modern, in their language.

Because of the high technicality of its tunes, this book of songs is also the darling of the high-brows in Odissi music. Singing of the *Champu's* songs in the appropriate style and tempo is the final test of musical talent among young aspirants in Orissa.

The emotional drama of the romance between Radha and Krishna has of course got the widest publicity in India through Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda.* In the *Kishorachandrananda champu,* the theme is the same and undoubtedly the Oriya poet must have got the inspiration from his compatriot's work in Sanskrit. Great credit, however, goes to the Oriya poet in that, apart from considerations of music and poetry, he has shown a decided improvement over the situations and the characters whose movements are here far less vulgar, more sublime than in the celebrated *Gitagovinda.*

The go-between in Jayadeva's poem is nondescript, and the hero and the heroine are just picturesque and personified sensuous sentiment, sometimes morbid. In Kavisurya's *champu* they are human beings of familiar flesh and blood, with hopes and frustrations as well as wiles and stratagems like ordinary lovers. And Lalita, their mutual confidante, comes out as the most interesting go-between in the whole Vaishnavic literature. This pleasantly roguish woman turns the two ardent and infatuated souls practically round her little finger before she allows them to come together.

When Radha confides to her how she had chanced upon a beauteous youth on the bank of the Yamuna, under a Nipa tree, and was immediately smitten with a hopeless attraction for him, Lalita, though happy at heart, tells her that she is already lost, by wanting the impossible. She is inviting ill-fame to boot. Little Radha piteously pleads with her for assistance as it was impossible for her to shake off her infatuation; she must either have Krishna's affection or die. Lalita again admonishes her for her impetuousity but promises to try. She then meets Krishna and inquires solicitously after his health as he appears to be far from well. Krishna at first gives a strategic reply, saying that there was nothing wrong at all. Lalita then tells him to give up pretensions and tell the truth as he does really look ill, in spite of his efforts to hide it. Then he reveals that the previous day, while he was returning with the cattle from the forest with other boys, he chanced to see behind a window a figure of pure gold, with eyes like the petals of a blue lotus. Since then his heart has been yearning to meet the beauty. At this Lalita starts scolding him, saying that the object of his

interest is somebody else's wife and it were a sin and a scandal to desire her. Then again, she says, even if he escapes somehow, what happens to her delicate friend? And if the matter reaches the ears of Kamsa, even he and his father may be put in prison.

Like Radha, Krishna too pleads with her to help arrange a meeting, as otherwise he will die of sheer frustration. A series of clever remonstrations and counter-appeals of the same kind follow, each in a song of exquisite craftsmanship. Then Lalita relents and agrees to try.

But when she is back with Radha, the rogue changes her tune and tells her that no matter how she tried, Krishna appeared adamant and only scolded her for her audacious proposal and even for her own free unchaperoned movement in the forest, being a woman.

Radha faints and piteously appeals to her to hold out some ray of hope for her very survival and she asks if Lalita did not see any little sign of Shyama relenting.

'Oh, no! Oh, no, darling', cried Lalita, now completely moved, 'I was only measuring your patience. To tell you the truth he is more miserable than you. Come on, darling, I will take you to him.'

On the way the roguish girl twists simple, unsophisticated Radha's sentiments again and again and pretends to curse Radha for her seeming ingratitude. This is one of the finest lyrical gems in Oriya literature (the 'fa'-song). And when they see the beauteous vision of Krishna from a close distance, the naughty go-between herself bursts into beatific lyrical raptures (the 'bha'-song) in the following manner:

> See, darling, that sight Divine, by seeing which our human eyes find the worth of their creation. Lest you feel dizzy with infatuation, hold on to my arm and set your lotus feet firm on the ground. ...Without a desire to touch His body, merely keep on looking at that marvellous beauty...

Then the lovers meet and love has its final consummation. In the last ('ksha') song the poet sings a grand hymn to his great loving Lord Krishna:

> Oh Thou Ocean of mercy and forgiveness,

Who art in perpetual embrace with the full-breasted charms of Lakshmi;
Oh, Redeemer of the worlds,
Whose blessed servant is no other
Than the Great Brahma himself,
And the effulgence of whose toe-nails are cherished
By the gods as the embellishment of their foreheads,
Shall I, Oh Lord, miss Thine mercy,
Even though I, the first among the sinners, never utter Thine name?
Let Thine compassionate look alone destroy all my sins,
Oh redeemer of the fallen,
And even though my sins deserve no pardon,
Should I be thrown to the sufferings of hell, with an omnipotent master like Thee?
Oh Thou Destroyer of the sins of all the beings,
Oh Thou Delighter of the hearts of the pious,
Tired as I am, with incessant running after the illusions of the world,
Pray, relieve me of these frustrations,
And let that fact of Thy Grace get proclaimed from this earth below,
Up, above to the planes of the suns.

Taken as a whole, this *champu* has been rightly described by Pandit Kulamani Dasa, the learned editor of Kavisurya's complete works, as either 'musical poetry' or 'lyrical drama'. The rise and fall of the hopes in the lovers' hearts, their fears, frustrations, and ardent aspirations, their mad pursuit of each other without thought of environment, their final absolute surrender to each other and their mutual dependence on a sympathetic but naughty go-between, have nowhere been so realistically painted as in this little book of 34 songs. Without doubt it is a masterpiece, lyrically as well as dramatically.

Over other songs of Kavisurya, several hundreds in numbers, we need not stop. They are not very different in character from the *champu* songs, but only in the latter do we find Kavisurya at his best and worst. If he had yielded less to the temptation of the Bhanjian forms and styles, his general performance would have been of still higher quality. As

matters stand, he unwittingly suffers a great deal at times from mere verbosity.

Gopalakrishna

Gopalakrishna Pattanayaka was born in Parlakemedi in the district of Ganjam. He came of a family of hereditary accountants in the local Maharaja's secretariat. His descendants still live in the same house where the poet died in 1862. It is now almost a national shrine. A bust of the poet, made not long after his death, is worshipped every day by his descendants. To the devout Vaishnavas this great Viashnavic poet is almost a saint.

Like Kavisurya, Gopalakrishna also composed hundreds of songs, of which many have been lost. The devout poet, as indifferent to his literary creations as to his material condition, never cared to collect his own songs. The nation owes a deep debt of gratitude to an obscure friend of his, Haribandhu Pattanayaka, for collecting together as many of the poet's songs as he could gather out of people's memory.

Of songs, lyrics, and epics in Oriya on the Radha-Krishna theme, as we have already seen, there are more than enough. Most of them are just conventional verbosity. Only some, like a few poems and lyrics of Abhimanyu Samanta Simhara or of Kavisurya Ratha reveal, below the feudal tapestry of dictional and metrical traditions, a little of the genuine warmth of real human blood. It is only in the songs of Gopalakrishna that we come to feel the throbbing heart of an emotional and sensitive soul who appears to have himself suffered the pangs of a great love. In his songs Radha and Krishna are not just two religious symbols, two theological pegs to hang the human tale on, but a human tale that reaches Divine heights by the feel of intensity of the emotion, and the total, unbargaining surrender of the lovers treated as an integral part of an otherwise allegorical and spiritual romance, and without the gross, mundane delight that we most regretfully find in similar poetry of so many Krishnaites.

A crucial test of the greatness of Gopalakrishna's poetry is the fact that not only of the song-makers but of all Vaishnavic poets in Oriya literature, his songs and poems are the most amenable to translation, since they do not depend upon

mere wordy externals. They have a pregnant inner substance that is universal in its appeal. Withal, they are no less musical or rhythmic in diction and tune than those of his rivals. In the unobtrusive, natural economy of expression, and in the selection of tune and mood, they reveal the sure touch of a master artist, while the ethereal feeling in the poems reveals a highly developed soul.

It is strange that although the poet never attempted to narrate the Radha-Krishna story in a compact form as did Kavisurya in his *champu* or Samanta Simhara in the *Bidagdha chintamani*, and though he was indifferent to his compositions, which survive only because of friends' efforts to rescue them after his death, we now find in the assembled collection of unplanned poems, the whole story of the Radha-Krishna romance from hesitant beginnings to beatific consummation, set out in a far more delightful, natural and artistic manner than in the works of any other Vaishnavic Oriya poet. In all other poets Radha and Krishna and all the other characters of the story cling to the up-country traditions of Yamuna and Mathura and Brindavana. Only in Gopalakrishna's poems do they truthfully spring out of the natural and social environment, customs and traditions of any typical Orissa village. The poet wrote only what he saw and felt, and the universal entered naturally in his writing because the particular came right from life and not from tradition or conventions as with the others. The romance of Radha and Krishna in the songs of Gopalakrishna is not something just scriptural or predestined, to be taken for granted; it grows before our very eyes, step by step, like any such romantic affair, from chance acquaintance to the ecstatic joy of union, through the usual advances, refusals, quarrels, misunderstandings and the final surrender. It is one of the few great love-stories extant in Oriya literature. Only throuch a few such great songs by Gopalakrishna and a few *chhandas* of Samanta Simhara's *Bidagdha chintamani*, has the vast body of Vaishnava poetry in Oriya saved its face. Apart from these, it is a mass of hideously gross sexual crudities disguised as a religious cult.

In Gopalakrishna's songs we first meet Radha and Krishna as pre-adolescents living in separate parts of the town of

Brindavana on the Yamuna, unknown to each other. As youth begins to flower they come to know of each other's extraordinary qualities of body and mind through mutual relatives. That sets fire to their sensitive imaginations. They desire to meet and know and belong to each other—a very natural impulse in young minds.

This unique 'courtship', this 'love at hearing' as against the conventional 'love at sight' is described in two artistically logical 'lyrical dialogues', a genre attempted and that too most successfully, by Gopalakrishna alone in the whole of Oriya literature. Here are a few stanzas from one of them:

Radha Who is that prince of Braja, darling, you spoke about?
Lalita He is the same whose flute-playing so enchanted you the other day.
Radha What name did you say, darling?
Lalita Oh! you want to know and hear it again?
Krishna, I said, is the name, darling.

* * * *

Radha Is he generous at heart?
Lalita One who is lucky to get his grace once only, has no need to go abegging again.
Radha Is he married?
Lalita Mother Yasoda has set her eyes on you, darling, as her future daughter-in-law.
Radha Pray don't talk about me, please.
Lalita Those that match each other are to be united together. There is no reason to be in a pique over it, darling.

In the other lyrical dialogue, the opposite number of the one above, we find young Krishna whispering into the ears of Brinda: 'Who indeed is this Radha of this village Braja? Ever since I heard that name, I feel I am drinking nectar. Will you unravel this mystery, please?'

Out of such secret, hesitant queries about each other the romance grows. But in the meantime Radha is given away in marriage to somebody else. The poignancy of the feelings of the two lovers becomes all the keener as, due to social considerations, the two could not be married and now can-

not even meet each other openly. But their hearts beat all the quicker because of the obstructions, and their souls hurry towards each other, scaling all impediments.

At first the young, timid and delicate Radha is terribly afraid of a secret tryst, as is perfectly natural. Unfamiliar with these experiences, she tries desperately to avoid them. She therefore says to a friend in one of the songs:

The flute of this enchanting Shyama,
Will indeed undo me!
The other day I was in the midst of elders, busy chatting, when I heard it and was taken aback;
Hair stood on end all over my body
And I shivered as though with cold.
Perforce, I closed my eyes and lost all consciousness.
My mind flew away, I know not where,
I knew no more whether it was day or night, home or wilderness;
Or even whether I was awake or asleep.

In another song also she says in exasperation:

Ah! this new calamity!
I cannot get away from the thought of Krishna even for a moment!

But in and through these timid hesitancies so natural to young lovers, the stream of love was coursing in its own self-made channels. They agreed at last upon a tryst. Gopalakrishna portrays for us the natural workings of the heart of a young lady about to meet her lover for the first time and that too in secret. Radha asks the go-between:

'Have you indeed given him an appointment? Oh! I tremble even now, I don't know what will happen when I meet him! I go about the house in constant dread, lest the throbbing of my heart be detected by somebody! What was he doing when you left him? What did you say and what was his reply? I hope you are not just toying with me? Could you not go again and cancel this appointment? I am so terribly afraid of the consequences.'

But the lovers met at last, met again and again. The happiness of the consummation of their desires is beautifully expressed in many songs. In one such Radha says:

> Gladly have I given up family and community for the love of Krishna.
> His love is indeed the sole treasure of my life.
> I am now a beggarwoman and he is my begging bowl.
> I am an insignificant wild-flower, and he is my honey-bee.
> I shall be eternally telling the rosary of his Beauty and Virtues.

Then came also fits of jealousy, and a lover's right to take the erring loved-one to task. This bold transformation in a slip of a girl that timid Radha was when she first heard of Krishna's name, is so gradual and natural through the various songs of Gopalakrishna, that the casual reader takes it for granted, unconscious of the unique craftsmanship with which the poet has managed to present a great love story in his apparently scattered songs.

Here is a song of deep delusion and frustration from the dear little unsophisticated Radha:

> I have come to know at last the ways of Krishna!
> After the long vigil of an apparently endless night the dawn now appears in the eastern sky;
> In what an inauspicious moment did I dress myself up for this outing,
> Now that I end this adventure like an unknown flower of the wilderness!
> I have realised indeed the fruits of my trust in a man and his clandestine love!

In the very next song in the collection she says:

> Don't touch me, Krishna, get away from here;
> Heed my protest, and don't behave like a naughty boy;
> You had better go elsewhere for your jokes;
> My friends will come now and taunt the life out of me.

But the great Radha very soon rises above these petty human feelings. Her love attains a height where, on the

ethereal plane of a sublime emotion, she forgets completely her own self, her claims and rights, and wholly surrenders to her naughty lover. This grand sublimation of the ego, this emergence of luminous Love, rising above gross physical delights or sense of possession, Gopalakrishna has depicted most tellingly in many an excellent song that enthrals millions of hearts all over Orissa. In one song Radha says:

> Am I indeed a match for my Shyamabandhu?
> I wonder if I am equal to the dust of His feet!
> Don't please compare me with Krishna and invite taunts from the world;
> Why take the honey-bee from a full-blown lotus to a flower in the wilderness?

And in another she speaks with the deepest poignancy of pathos and self-abnegation:

> Shall I mind His unkindness to me, who am no more to Him than a humble maid?
> Would Radha ever take any pleasure in wounding Shyama's feelings? Rather would I wear myself out,
> Looking after any who takes His fancy.
> All the treasure of the world shall be mine
> If he is happy, even be it with another woman.
> My one desire is to see His face, once a day, even from a distance.
> Says Gopalakrishna: the friend laughed and said: See darling, who is behind you.

In another unique song also Radha says:

> Let me bear for ever on my head
> This scandal of Shyama, that I may pass
> My days with thoughts of Him and Him alone.
> Whatever people may say,
> The sins of many births float away
> When I but look at His beautiful face.

This is the grand finale of an apparently immoral, but really a great allegorical love story. In the hands of stupid mediocre writers it reeks with commonplace vulgarity. But

in the hands of those great spirits in whom faith and creative genius met in proper balance, as in Mira Bai or Gopalakrishna, this story exhales the supersensuous spiritual aroma that it was meant to. In Oriya, Gopalakrishna alone conveys the penetrating Truth and Goodness of Love, through simple, unaffected beauty, without caring for wordy bombast or trite conventionalities. In a forest noisy with the clamour of many birds, his is the soft sweet pathetic note of the nightingale that reaches direct to our hearts.

This dear poet is unique also in old Oriya literature in another aspect—as the delicious poet of childhood, the childhood of Krishna. In just a few poems describing little Krishna, the poet brings out all the loving waywardness, naughtiness and the thoughtless frolics of innocent childhood, as also the moving fondness of doting mother Yasoda.

Here is a lullaby the anxious mother sings to put the naughty restless child-Krishna to sleep:

> A thief is abroad in the village
> And shall kidnap you, if you refuse to sleep,
> Oh my miser's treasure and the moon of this village Gokul;
> Sleep, sleep, the night is still far from dawning.
> You have danced away the whole night,
> While the village slept.
> Why do your eyes refuse to have even one wink,
> Oh lamp of the tribe of cowherds?
> See, how your brother Rama went to bed long ago, leaving play!

No other Vaishnava poet in Oriya has touched on this aspect of Krishna's life, perhaps because it did not come under the heading of so-called 'Love'. But true poet that he was, Gopalakrishna saw life as a whole and saw poetry wherever there was beauty, grace and warmth of the human heart.

Banamali

Though most probably the youngest of the three celebrated Vaishnava song-makers, nothing much has as yet been discovered about the life of this poet. The reason may be

that unlike the other two of his class, Banamali left the world and became a real Vaishnava *sannyasi* and is said to have died at Brindabana. The *math* to which he was attached is still flourishing near Puri, and has preserved the memories of the poet-saint with reverential care, but not his songs.

Banamali's songs are neither as numerous as those of Kavisurya or of Gopalakrishna, nor are they as ornate as the former's or as deep as the latter's. They are simple, forthright, unambitious; but they throb with the fervour of a true zealot. The poet has so far been unfortunate in not finding an enthusiastic collector or suitable editor of his poems. But whatever has been collected and published is sufficient to convey to readers his spiritual vision and sincerity. Here is one song of his that strongly reminds us of a similar song by Vidyapati.

(*Radha to her Lady-friend*)

I am now like the pincers of the blacksmith, my darling, plunged now in water and now in fire; but both are the same to Him!

People hope for happiness through Love, but it has made me most miserable, darling. I remain unsatisfied, however long I gaze upon Him, and my eyes nearly burst if I do not see Him at all.

This also is another characteristic of this sinful love, that the more you defame Him, the gladder it makes my heart, and it sinks the moment you praise Him.

When we meet, my vision adheres to His personality. A year's looking passes like a moment's and a moment of non-seeing appears an endless aeon.

Hapiness there is none in Love. I am dying each moment thinking and thinking of Him only.

THE METAPHYSICALS

The current started by the Buddhist-Psalms of 7th-9th centuries runs unimpeded through all periods of Oriya

literature, parallel to other streams of development. But at this period it had apparently dwindled from the flood-tide of religious enthusiasm of the Panchasakhas' times. Actually it had only mingled its overflowing waters with the new river of Bhakti that flooded the land, centering round the cult of Krishna.

The innumerable *Gitas*, *Samhitas* and *Mahatmyas* composed by various Dasas (servants) of God[1] had kept the flame of pure mysticism burning all along. From among the concourse of many minor voices, two stand out prominently, both of whom are of as high stature as any of the Panchasakha band. They are Arakshita Dasa, the author of *Mahimandala Gita*, and Bhima Bhoi, the blind Khond poet, the one flourishing in the hilly ex-states areas of Western Orissa and the other in the eastern coastal areas.

The two were almost contemporaries, and it is strange that quite unknown to each other, they preached identical doctrines. Both were heretical and iconoclastic, openly denouncing idolatry and priestcraft. They appealed to people to have faith in and worship only the Formless Brahman. The simplicity of their language as against the over-ornate style of the Krishnaites and Ramaites is also amazing. It suited their simple faiths most admirably.

It is still more amazing that both these saintly personalities, quite unknown to civilisation, were also preaching the same religious reform as Raja Rammohan in Bengal and exactly in the same period. While Bhima Bhoi's Mahima or Alekha religion smacks strongly of Buddhism, which forms the all-pervasive substratum of Orissa's religious culture and comes up again and again in the writings of its saints and thinkers, Arakshita Dasa's Brahma-based nonconformist religion is identical in fundamentals with Brahmoism as established by Raja Rammohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen. The differences are merely those imposed by Western education and ideas. These greatly influenced the Bengali reformers. There cannot be any question of their borrowing ideas from Bengal,

[1] Almost all authors of this category have let themselves known as Dasas such as Jagannatha Dasa, Arakshita Dasa, Divakara Dasa, etc. etc. It was indeed a religious convention, like the universal Sikh surname of Singh (lion), for these religious writers to call themselves as Dasas or servants.

as both Bhima Bhoi and Arakshita Dasa were ignorant of any other language except their mother-tongue and both died long before English education spread beyond the few coastal towns in Orissa.

Arakshita Dasa

He appears to be a most romantic character in the entire religious and literary history of Orissa. His life throughout reminds us of prince Siddhartha of Kapilvastu. He was a brother (some say, heir-apparent) of the Raja of Bodakhemidi, a well-known principality in the district of Ganjam in south Orissa. He knew all the luxury of a royal household. He himself says in his autobiographical *Mahimandala Gita:*

What indeed did I not enjoy when I was in the world? I wore silk clothes and jewels and used aromatics on my body. I slept on soft beds, had my head decorated with flowers. I dined habitually on sweets, cakes, *khichari* and pudding and I used to ride horses.

He left this world of luxury at the young age of eighteen and wandered from hill to hill, forest to forest, and village to village spending eighteen years in search of Truth and self-realisation, and for long periods living on water only. During these mystic peregrinations, the erstwhile prince was almost beaten to death by a gardener at Puri, who suspected him to be a poacher. It speaks volumes in favour of the eternal Feminine that it was a woman who saved his life on this occasion; and again it was a pious lady, a widow who, observing his incredible austerities and his tender age, advised him to go back to the world, marry and lead a comfortable life.

During his wanderings the saintly prince visited the temples of a number of well-known gods and goddesses in Orissa. Completely disillusioned about their Divinity, like young Dayananda Saraswati later on, he started preaching openly against idol worship. During his spiritual evolution, the prince realised also the illogicality of Hindu caste prejudices and gladly ate from all sorts of so-called low castes. He says:

I have taken food from all householders, from the Brahmin

and the Chandala. Thou art in all. Milk from cows of many colours is white. The blood of all people is red.

In another place he advises: 'Look upon all as equal. Nobody should be treated as an untouchable. Even the holy and unholy are equal and men and women too.'

After eighteen years of terrific austerities as a wandering ascetic, the prince-saint settled down on the Olasuni hill in the district of Cuttack. He died about the second quarter of the 19th century. The hill *ashram* where he died is now a place of pilgrimage and the headquarters of a growing sect that is dedicated to the religious tenets of this great mystic.

Bhima Bhoi

For students of ethnology, religion and culture the historic state of Orissa provides a very interesting field where one meets with a harmonious synthesis of various opposing forces which in other places have either resulted in conflicts that still continue, or have settled into mutual exclusiveness. Perhaps nowhere else in India have traits of Adivasi life and culture so unobtrusively intermingled with and become integral parts of the national life of a people supposed to be of Aryan texture. We have discussed before how the Hindu God Jagannatha at Puri, who attracts millions of Hindus from all over India to the State of Orissa, was originally a deity of the tribals. From the fourteenth century down to modern times the Adivasi has figured in Oriya literature both as a subject of romantic description and, more important still, as poet and writer in the language. The greatest Adivasi poet of Orissa flourished in the last century and through his life and creations has turned out to be one of the most remarkable writers in the entire field of Indian literature.

Bhima Bhoi was a Khond—a tribe once notorious for human sacrifices in their turmeric fields. He was born in one of the interior native states of Orissa and is said to have lost his eyesight in early childhood after an attack of smallpox. Young Bhima, thus blinded, probably wandered from place to place as a beggar without any opportunity to learn the letters. In his early youth or a little later he is supposed

to have come in contact with another remarkable personality. That man was the prophet of a new religion whose followers are now numbered in thousands in and outside Orissa. His heretical new faith inspired the blind, unlettered, homeless Khond youth to burst into poetry. Throughout a long life he preached in hundreds of *bhajans* the truths that he imbibed from his master, with all the zeal and conviction of a convert and a missionary. These *bhajans* are now sung and listened to by tens of thousands in Orissa, particularly in the rural areas.

Alekha Cult

We cannot understand our poet unless we know a little more of his spiritual teacher. Less of course is known about him than about his poet-disciple. The Master is said to have attained his spiritual realisation after long penance on a hill in the wilds of Keonjhar state. At almost the same time that Raja Rammohan Roy was preaching the pure monotheism of the Vedanta and denouncing popular idolatry and other superstitions of the Hindus, this remarkable man was doing just the same thing in the wilds of Orissa, all unknown so far to history. The religion he preached is known as Alekha Dharma or the Religion of the Formless God. It is also known as Mahima Dharma or the Religion of Glory, i.e. the Glory of God who cannot be expressed in pictures or idols. The prophet is thus popularly known as Mahima Gosain or the 'Master who preached the Glory'.

This Mahima or Alekha religion does not recognise the caste system of the Hindus and is severely iconoclastic. It asks people to have faith only in the one invisible Power that created this world and to worship Him and Him only. It has no ceremonies, but emphasises the observance of a few simple moral principles like honesty, truthfulness, non-adultery, etc. It is remarkable also that unlike the multitude of sects in the Hindu faith it does not put a premium on asceticism, but assures its followers of the great religious merit of an honestly-lived family life. Except for its faith in a personal God, the tenets of this new religion have remarkable resemblance to Buddhism. Many scholars indeed think that this Alekha religion is nothing but a revival of Buddhism in Orissa in a new garb.

The Master has left no writings of his own. He too perhaps was unlettered. It was left to his blind Khond disciple to preach his master's faith to millions through inspired poetry, and he appears to have suffered a lot in his life for taking the mantle of his master upon his shoulders. Unlike most poets he lived his poetry and suffered social persecution and ostracism for preaching heresies. In a caste-ridden society, his very birth as a Khond was not a small handicap to start with. Then cruel fate made him blind at early age. Materially, he was not much above a mendicant *sannyasi*, and he added to his troubles by accepting a heretical faith and boldly preaching it wherever he went. Perhaps only late in life, when he had a large number of disciples, he married and made a home. In many a poem of his, the deep tragedy of his hunted, persecuted and unappreciated life finds poignant expression. In one such he says:

Oh my Lord, why don't you help me? In preaching your Glory, my own reputation has been broken to pieces. For speaking of You as the Unknown One, they taunt me as a 'Christian' (i.e. a heretic) and inflict upon me untold suffering. They are enveloped with sin as with air, but denounce me if I speak to them of the religion of Truth. They say, 'Drive him away, drive him away! Let us see how his Master protects him!' 'He is a sinner,' they say, 'do not give him shelter,' and when I preach equality they retaliate by treating me like a dog. My Lord, this is my fate wherever I go. I feel like not going anywhere henceforth. In the face of these tyrannies what shall I do?

But in the inmost recesses of his soul the poet had nothing but the strongest conviction that the sinful times would be soon cut short and the Kingdom of Heaven established. This idea is expressed in almost all of his innumerable *bhajans* and seems to have sustained the blind poet in and through his misfortunes. The following lines are typical of his grim prophecy and remind one of the righteous indignation of the Hebrew prophets:

These tyrannies will end. The great Master will break their egotism. The time is not far. He, without being direct

and visible, will bring things to pass in subtle ways and they (the sinners) will disappear one by one without others even being conscious of it. They are immersed in sins and illegalities and involved in all sorts of hypocrisies. Which religion will save them and in what way? Some will be burnt in fire, some will be drowned in water and some will die falling from trees. Some will be stung to death by serpents and others will die with halters round their necks. They will suffer from unknown diseases, their bodies shaking with palsy and those that survive will be lacking all strength.

The poet's pity for suffering humanity was unbounded. In a magnificent couplet he says: Who indeed can bear to see such misery among the world's creatures? Let me stay in hell forever, if the world can thereby be saved.

His critical attitude to idolatry finds vivid expression in the following lines:

It is in utter ignorance that people offer *puja* to various gods and prostrate themselves before idols, make offerings of delicacies to them and appeal to them for mercy. These are mere idols, lacking life; how can they grant boons to votaries? Bewildered by Maya, people do not see this. They have not learnt to surrender themselves to the One who created their bodies and souls, but run to wooden figures and say, 'Oh, save my life!' What ignorance indeed for human beings to worship dead matter, while they refuse to know the One who created them out of nothing!

The unlettered, blind, poverty-stricken, wandering Adivasi poet had no pretensions to any kind of scholarship. He has poured out his feelings in the language that he daily spoke or heard others speak. As a result his poetry, though full of vigour and power, lacks artistry. His words also lack precision; the basic ideas sometimes appear blurred. For instance he often confuses his master, Mahima Gosain, with the 'Unwritten One' that his master preached about. This is quite understandable, however, in a country where the idea of God descending on earth as an *Avatara* to uplift humanity is an integral part of the people's basic concepts. But in spite of this confusion the poet's conception of God is free

from all dogma, all narrowness and is positively humanistic. At one place he says: 'He has no rest in summer, or during the rains or at any other season. He is ceaselessly working. God indeed is Himself suffering to save our world.'

In the following *bhajan*, the missionary poet appeals to all to live in God in the midst of all worldly activities:

The Kali era is passing away, the Satya Yuga is about to be ushered in,
And the signs of the future are a vast confusion in which none can protect anybody else.
There shall be refuge for no one in the whole world;
All the nine continents will be quaking with fright.

The people of the south will run north and vice versa,
There will be terrible events in course of hostilities between Satya and Kali.
The people of the east will run westward and those of the west towards the east, and
The people of all the four quarters will be mixed up in bewildering confusion.

I appeal therefore to you, menfolk, that ye lay your faith in the Glory, and
Keep Him ever present in the lotus of your heart in the midst of all your vocations.
Do whatever you may, but regard what you do as the work of the great Brahma,
And if you put faith in the Guru, he is sure to carry you towards salvation.

Ye women of the world, who are busy with your households,
Have an eye on salvation while caring for your sons and daughters.
Stick boldly to the Divine work, in spite of the delights of sex,
In the midst also of all your household botherations.

Let kings rule states from their thrones;
But let them keep the Glory alive at heart, dispensing absolute justice.

How will this world carry on, if punishment is out of relation to crimes?
How will people obey the law? And will authority be in peace?
Let kings therefore follow the True Religion, along with statecraft.
If a Kshatriya has the True Faith, he may arm himself *to the teeth*
And rush into the battle-field like a lion and kill even cows and Brahmins;
And a Vedic Brahmin may adhere to the eternal Vedic rituals only;
But let both remember the Glory in their soul of souls.

Let the kings, the Brahmins and all else on earth try to follow the True Religion;
Take note of my word in time, as I speak out of compassion for you all.
The Age is coming to an end, surrender yourself to the Guru.
So says Bhima, the Khond, plainly, in this eighteen hundredth couplet.[1]

BRAJANATHA BADAJENA

Not only in this particular period, but in the whole of Oriya literature, Brajanatha Badajena is unique. Even as late as a decade ago, this original creator was either ignored or lightly passed over by even the literary critics in Orissa, not to speak of the common reader. Only with the change of values in literature in recent years, is Badajena being gradually recognised as the most modern of all the writers in old Oriya literature. He has successfully experimented with several styles of literary composition which no one in Orissa had tried before, and even in what he wrote in the traditional manner, he has left the deep impress of a strong individuality. By certain standards he may not be great but that he was a daring pioneer, an artist with ways of doing things all his own, an unflinchingly original mind that refused to toe the line, one who has left behind contributions to the

[1] This is the 90th *bhajan* in Bhima Bhoi's *Stuti-chintamani*, containing one hundred *bhajans* of two thousand couplets.

national heritage of his people that are absolutely unique and precious.

The poet was born in 1730 and is believed to have passed away in 1795, only 8 years before the British occupied Orissa. He came of a family of distinguished ancestry and high cultural tradition. The poet and all his three brothers were accomplished not only in literature but also in other arts. They were all officials under the Raja of Dhenkanal, one of the ex-feudatory States of Orissa.

But as usually happens with his tribe, the poet himself had a chequered career, which ended in great suffering in spite of his many and unusual accomplishments—in languages, arts and crafts. He served under many Rajas, only to leave each after violent differences. Endowed as he was with unusual talents, this man could not possibly play the part of a sychophant at a court, like the mediocrities that generally gather round seats of power. That temparament seems to have been the main cause of his sufferings.

There are now thirteen books available to Badajena's credit. Of these, *Chatur-vinoda*, a story-cycle in prose, *Ambika-vilasa*, a major *kavya*, and *Samara-taranga*, a poem describing actual battles fought between the Maratha invaders and the forces of the Dhenkanal Chief, are really outstanding. And each is important enough to deserve separate mention and discussion.

Chatur-vinoda (Four entertainments)

This is the one prose work in the whole of old Oriya literature that is original, planned and complete. The style is strikingly fresh, untrammelled, conversational, and very near the modern. The book seems to be the poet's earliest product and to have been written for courtly ears. That explains, I think, its dominantly erotic character. The main story is the romance of the pretty daughter of a rich merchant and the local prince, who fall in love with each other at first sight. The young lady gives sufficient encouragement for the handsome prince to visit her secretly in her chamber, only to find to his regret that she, on that day, was observing a religious vow that not only forbade delights of love but prescribed a vigil too. The prince volunteers to share the

vigil with his sweet companion, and to keep her entertained he starts telling stories. These are divided into four *vinodas* or entertainments: 'Hasa-vinoda', 'Rasa-vinoda', 'Niti-vinoda', and 'Priti-vinoda'. Hence the title *Chatur-vinoda* or 'the Four Entertainments'. Each 'vinoda' contains several stories inside a main story, so that it is not possible even to summarise any of them here.

Considering the romantic situation round which the story-cycle was planned, the poet's young years and the audience for whom it was written, no critic has any right to under-value it because it is lacking in highly edifying qualities. But taking into account the verse-ridden age in which the poet lived, verse that had no relation whatsoever with life, this prose adventure in a style as close to the speech of the common man as was possible two centuries ago, wins our unstinted admiration. The stories are quite intriguing, with plenty of suspense and unexpected endings, and open up a social panoroma of those days. It is indeed remarkable also that in this prose work, written in Oriya two centuries ago, we find free-verse for the first time—free-verse which is so vauntingly brandished before us by some moderns as a grand novelty, but which occurs on the very first page of the first story of Badajena's *Chatur-vinoda* in the satiric description of a fat, ugly Rani:

> Her waist was like a drum,
> And her barren, plump, protruding belly
> Looked as if she was carrying for the tenth month.

Even to describe a Rani, a queen, in such terms in those feudal times and before a feudal audience, must amount to blasphemy. How many writers today would dare openly call a Minister stupid, even if he really was?

Ambika-vilasa

This is a *kavya* on the marriage of Siva with Parvati, with the Siva-Sakti episode for prelude. Its authorship is still disputed between Birabhadra Bhanja, a former ruler of Keonjhar, and our poet. The donation of the authorship of particular books to patrons by needy poets in return for

amenities was a common practice in those days. In spite of Raja Birabhadra of Keonjhar's royal stamp of authorship on *Ambika-vilasa,* it is abundantly clear from internal evidence that it was written by the master pen of Badajena, or at least its major and important portions were. The Raja, as author *de jure,* himself admits that he was advised in this work by many poets and pandits, and the descriptions of military defence as given in the last canto but one, the inclusion of Iraqi, Arab and Sindhi horses as part of Uma's marriage portion, the realistic description of pecular Oriyia dishes in the 23rd canto, all bear unmistakable family resemblance to Badajena's *Samara-taranga* and *Chatur-vinoda.* This *kavya* is on the whole so unconventional and so different from other *kavyas* in Oriya in its portrayal of the actual realities of social life, that its author must have been someone quite original and unorthodox. That Badajena was with this particular ruler of Keonjhar for some time and left him after some disagreement is a fact. It cannot be that Badajena, a poet, was there at the Keonjhar court for any job other than literary—which was in all probability nothing but the writing of *Ambika-vilasa,* with the authorship bespoke to the Raja. And the quarrel with the patron must have also arisen out of this shady transaction—over the complete surrender of authorship or over an inadequate return. Anyway the Raja, who has not another page of literary composition to prove his poetic talent, could certainly not be the writer of such a unique and high class *kavya.* Again, this book fits so well with Badajena's other works as to leave little doubt about its authorship.

Samara-Taranga

This is a thin volume but really a very remarkable work. It describes the Dhenkanal Raja's wars with the Marathas and also with the neighbouring Chief of Keonjhar, in both of which Badajena makes his second royal patron (the first being the Raja of Keonjhar) noisily triumphant. Pandit Banambara Acharya, the editor of *Ambika-vilasa,* tries to prove the authorship of the Raja of Keonjhar (at that time the great Pandit was unfortunately serving in Keonjhar State), and he hotly disputes, with good reason, the claim

for the Dhenkanal Raja's victory over Keonjhar as given in *Samara-taranga*. Dhenkanal's victory over the Maratha forces, the main theme of the book, could also at best be only half true.

Badajena has besmirched a beautiful work, this *Samara-taranga*, by hyperbolic panegyrics to a personality that did not even deserve a mere "thank you". Reading between the lines all that is available about Badajena, one is convinced that this Trilochana Mohindra Bahadur, the then ruler of Dhenkanal and the hero of *Samara-taranga*, as also the poet's patron for a time, was not only not a worthy hero but in reality a usurper of his principality as well as in the literary field.

There is no doubt that the work was not a spontaneous composition but a command performance. The wily Raja utilised the talents of the needy poet to cover up his actual shortcomings and ignominies. In his peroration the poet confesses unreservedly that he had wandered wide in search of a living but in vain and that he hoped with this *Samara-taranga* he might be permanently settled in comfort. He records that even before the book was finished the great king in return for its composition granted him a village on the river Brahmani and five hundred *kahans* of *cowri* every year, to be enjoyed by the poet and his descendants.

But thanks to the discovery by Shri Sudhakara Pattanayaka, the very competent editor of Badajena's works, of a little 'Satiric appeal to the king' which Badajena wrote a few years after, this petty Raja, whom the poet had once glorified in nauseatingly exaggerated terms, is exposed in his true colours. This small autobiographical poem reveals the poet in desparate poverty and so disillusioned with the Raja's so-called 'grants' that he now offers to return the gift village 'arid and wild all around for ages, where tiger-cubs were born in front of everybody', to the state. The poet was so out of favour with the Raja that he often ran after the Raja's palanquin in order to have a word with him, but in seven years never got an opportunity to speak to him—the princely 'patron' as often turned away his head. It is difficult to think of him with charity.

All the same, *Samara-taranga* is a remarkable poem for

many reasons. Descriptions of wars and battles are many in Oriya literature. The muse of Sarala Dasa who belonged to the caste of peasant-militia, seems to dance in delight as well as sing on battle-fields. His *Mahabharata* is remarkable for the thrill and the tempo, the suspense and the swayings of war, told in manly, vigorous narratives. Thanks to the revealing critical evaluations of the historian Dr Krishna Chandra Panigrahi, we know now that the military expeditions of Arjuna in Southern India as narrated by Sarala Dasa are only thinly veiled campaigns of the successful soldier-king Kapilendra Deva of Orissa, Sarala's contemporary. It is, however, in Badajena's poem that for the first time in Oriya literature, we come across a real war described with the actual heroes of the drama appearing in literature, as happens today in war-memoirs or war-plays and novels. Badajena's descriptions of the preparations for the war, the disposition of the cannon, the cavalry and the infantry, the emotions of soldiers on the eve of the battle, the hideous shambles that a battle leaves behind with the piteous cries of the dying and the wounded, the routed army's pell-mell flight for life, are all depicted in fitting words and colours, without the least effort at exaggeration or for effect. The manly, stirring address (which might be pure imagination) of the Raja to his courtiers who advised him to make a retreat from his fort, is worthy to be treasured in any literature:

'You all, without an exception, have opted for a retreat. But I am determined to stay on. Let anybody come and dislodge me from here. Let the man bearing arms go and plough fields if he is afraid of death. The beauty of a soldier's life lies in his death on the battle-field. Fame alone survives after death and nobody cares to mention a coward except with contempt. Isn't it great fun that we have already pushed back such a big army? Even Indra's fortune cannot be greater than our armed alertness by day and by night! This you want to forgo and counsel a retreat? Oh, the happy memories after the battle is over! Memories of the accurate aiming of guns and spears from behind these ramparts against the enemy, and the rush of soldiers unto death like *sattis*! And if they return not home, do they not share seats of glory in Heaven with the king of gods! The hero that dies with his

hand still wielding his weapon is beyond compare. He is lucky indeed whose body is torn with wounds on the battle-ground. The coward is merely a girl in spite of his male form. He whose heart palpitates at the sight of blood is contemptible, no matter if he be covered with jewels or possesses wealth untold. Don't talk of leaving the fort. With sword and shield let us, with God in our hearts, rush into the flanks of the enemy, unconcerned about consequences. Arguments apart, who advises us to compromise with the nuisance of these Bargis?'

In an age when all other poets were busy writing about Radha and Krishna only, Badajena wrote of contemporary military events. That itself makes him outstanding. He has used the same metres that Bhanja and his followers used for romances, and with equally good effect, to describe warlike preparations and actual battles. That is another credit to Badajena, as he revealed new strength and utility in the metres that had been employed for centuries for quite other purposes.

But in spite of the historicity of the action in *Samara-taranga* and the fact that the Maratha forces had indeed been led by Chimanaji Bapu, the seventeen-year old son of Madhoji Bhonsla, the victory of the Dhenkanal forces as publicised in the poem is perhaps only a half-truth. The Raja did agree after all to quit his capital. The poet gives it out as a matter of strategy. But it may be presumed that, after some initial successes against the Marathas, the Raja ultimately owned defeat and agreed to pay tithes as before. According to Shri Sudhakara Pattanayaka, this Raja Trilochana Mahindra Bahadur was an upstart who had murdered the real heirs to the Dhenkanal throne. In spite of Badajena's artistry in this poem and the unseemly adulation for which alone it was apparently written, the same poet's other writings reveal what a tin-soldier this Raja Trilochana was.

Completely deceived and disillusioned at his court, the poverty-stricken poet, now old and burdened with a large family of dependants, and sustaining himself and them with only one meal a day, seems to have moved to the court of the Raja of Khurda as a last resort. A poem by him describing Jagannatha's car festival, is dedicated to this last patron.

Such a tragic ending to such a talented life leaves a very melancholy feeling. There is no doubt that the poet had an uncompromising nature. But he goes down a little in our estimation for the fact that at one time in his life, even if out of dire need, he himself yielded to the temptation which he satirises in *Śamara-taranga*: 'The poets hesitate not to tell untruths and throw out panegyrics to procure privilege.'

This may even have been a self-condemnation. And a poet who dares to speak out like that even if himself guilty, on account of circumstances beyond his control, of what he condemns, deserves salutation. Badajena, with all the suffering and frustrations of his life, stands now as a glory to Oriya literature, with a separate shrine of his own.

SOME REMARKABLE BOOKS

Some books of interest other than poetical were also written in this period, all of them in verse—which shows the wide-spread culture in the land. Thanks to the indefatigable labours of enthusiastic research scholars like Pandit Sadasiva Ratha Sarma of Puri, such books are slowly coming to light which were completely unknown before.

One of these is *Paika-kheda* (Book of the Soldier) published by Ratha Sarma himself. The author, a seasoned soldier, says in the book that the art of war was gradually being forgotten for lack of practical experience and so, to save it from complete oblivion, he had tried to sketch out the salient facts of military tradition and practice. From the description of well-known *vyuhas* or battle-arrays, the author goes to details of weapons, arrangements for nursing the wounded, and the system of recruiting soldiers. This book should be translated into Hindi at least for a comparative study of similar works in other Indian languages. In the midst of heaps of effeminate songs and poems, this virile work of a soldier has an extraordinary importance.

Ratha Sarma has also discovered a very important work on the Orissan style of architecture and sculpture, with all details of the actual working and the complete nomenclature.

Another discovery by the same scholar in recent years,

not yet published, is a full treatise on the Orissan dance, complete with exquisite illustrations.

Dhananjaya Bhanja, grandfather of Upendra Bhanja, has left us, besides his poineering *kavya*, *Raghunathavilasa*, separate treatises on elephants, horses and precious stones.

All these unfortunately still await the printing machine to be made easily available to scholars for proper appraisal.

EPILOGUE

We have now covered nearly a thousand years, from the 9th to 19th century, in which Oriya literature had its beginnings and gradually developed. Before we start on the modern period, it will be interesting to have just a last look back.

The British occupied Orissa in 1803. Abhimanyu Samanta Simhara died five years later, Kavisurya forty-two years, Gopalakrishna sixty and Bhima Bhoi sixty-five years later. Kavisurya and Gopalakrishna worked under British collectors in south Orissa which was then in Madras Presidency. Bhima Bhoi speaks of Christian missionaries who by his time had even penetrated into the forest interior of Orissa. But not one of these writers knew English or had any contact with western culture. They all died like pure indigenous oriental flowers, emitting their lovely native fragrance. At least Gopalakrishna and Bhima Bhoi were contemporary to Fakirmohana and Radhanatha, who at Balasore in north Orissa were ushering in the modern era. But these builders of old and new Oriya literature, living in the same period, never knew one another. That speaks volumes indeed about the darkness and backwardness of the national life of the Oriyas even 70 years ago. As a matter of fact the Oriyas had no national existence in those days. They were scattered in four different provinces. Their literature alone was their national life. That is the greatest heritage the old masters have left behind to the modern Oriyas. As has been said already in the introductory chapters of this book, the old Oriya literature served its purpose in a unique manner as the expression of the mass mind of the Oriyas, who lay scattered over a wide area and were politically long cut off from one another. By the time it stopped functioning,

it was endowed with an enormous collection of *puranas*, *kavyas*, *samhitas*, *gitas*, and *kathas*, mostly in verse and song, but some also in prose. It had indeed induced not only every village but every important family in each village, to take pride in possessing a library. It had filled Orissa's 50,000 villages with music, recitation, street plays, poetic contests and literary discussions. In a word it had made the whole of Orissan people, women not excluded, literature-conscious. It is no compliment to the modern system of education or to the new patterns of literature adopted in imitation of European models, nor to the new writers, that with the printing press and the postal services at their disposal, they have so far failed to make as deep an impression on the masses, as did the old Oriya literature written laboriously on palm-leaves with an iron stylus, and having very limited means of publicity. The masses in Orissa still get their spiritual and mental nourishment from Orissa's ancient authors, the glorious band from Sarala Dasa to Gopalakrishna.

CHAPTER XI

MODERN PERIOD

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As has already been said, the onset of the dark night of the Oriyas, so prosperous for long periods of history, who had built magnificent temples, embanked and bridged rivers, and ruled over an extensive stretch of land from the Ganga to the Godavari, almost synchronised with the advent of Chaitanya from Moslem-ruled Bengal to independent Hindu Orissa, during the reign of Prataprudra Deva. An extensive Oriya territory that was lost to Krishna Deva Raya during that king's reign while Chaitanya was present at Puri, remained outside Orissa for over two centuries and was *reunited to* the motherland as recently as 1936, losing nearly a half again. Only 40 years after Chaitanya's death, the main political unit of Orissa completely lost its independence, in 1668. During the reign of Shajahan the extensive territory that now forms the districts of Midnapur and Hooghly in Bengal was detached from Orissa, of which it had been an integral part from time immemorial, and was annexed to the Bengal subah for commercial and administrative convenience. That too is lost to Orissa forever. Sambalpur and the surrounding Oriya lands in Madhya Pradesh remained long under the Marathas. Sambalpur came back to Orissa only in 1905 and Khariar in 1936, leaving extensive Oriya speaking lands still in Madhya Pradesh. Orissa lost Singhbhum, apparently for good, in 1955, in the reorganisation of States in India.

There has never been a more cruel vivisection of a people than that of the Oriyas, quartered and broken limb from limb through centuries, as described above. It is hard for an average educated Oriya to shake off the bitterness of feeling born of these political mishaps and linguistic amputations.

When the British occupied Orissa in 1803, the priests of the temple of Jagannatha could welcome their victorious

general in sonorous, adulatory Sanskrit, because the two hundred years under the rule of the Moguls, the Pathans and the Marathas had created completely anarchical conditions in the country. All through those two centuries under different governments, battles and rebellions had been almost a daily occurrence. The Oriyas, lacking a great leader, were fighting one another in opposite camps. But unlike the previous administrations that only wanted to squeeze money out of the people, the British rule, the last, was total. And in consequence, the nation threw out leaders of real national stature against this one single, total enemy of the people, the Feringee.

Just three years after the British occupation of Orissa, Jayakrishna Raiguru, the hereditary priest of the descendants of the Gajapatis, who were then known as the Rajas of Khurda, organised a national revolt. The great Brahmin soldier was, however, captured, hanged and quartered—his limbs publicly hung on trees. But this did not deter the Oriyas. In 1818 the whole nation rose up in revolt again under the inspiring leadership of Bakshi Jagabandhu Vidyadhara, the hereditary Commander-in-Chief of the Raja of Khurda. For six months there was practically no British Government, at least in the south of Orissa. The rebellion was in the end ruthlessly quelled. And the aftermath was disastrous for the Oriyas. The Paikas, the national militia of Orissa, were disarmed and their hereditary *jagir* lands were taken away from them. This, plus the new tenancy laws including the notorious 'Sunset Law' that practically uprooted the Orissa nobility from the entire coastal area of the districts of Balasore, Puri and Cuttack, turned the Oriya peasantry into a race of coolies.

In all these nefarious transactions, it has most regretfully to be recorded, the scheming hands of intermediaries from outside Orissa working under the East India Company are most evident; they worked for their own aggrandisement. The historian R. D. Banerjee admits that: 'In fact Bengalis of a low type ruled Orissa for nearly half-a-century after the conquest. Having control of judicial and executive work, the Bengali found Orissa an easy means to get rich quick. ... Hundreds of old Oriya noblemen were ruined and their

ancient heritage passed into the hands of Bengali zamindars.'[1]

But it has still more to be regretted that not content with the devastating economic ruin that the Bengali officials brought about in Orissa, in the fifties of the last century, no less a man than Raja Rajendralal Mitra supported the nonsensical propaganda in Calcutta that Oriya was a dialect of Bengali and, therefore, Bengali in place of Oriya should be compulsorily introduced in all the schools in Orissa. It should be borne in mind that from 1803 to 1912, for one hundred and nine years, what was Orissa during that time was merely an adjunct of Bengal. Calcutta was its administrative headquarters and it was non-Oriyas who ran the entire administration down to the posts of police constables and low-grade assistant teachers.

But by the time the linguistic guillotine was being set up for the Oriyas in Calcutta, Orissa had thrown up a brilliant and patriotic son, to spearhead the Oriya opposition. He was Fakirmohana Senapati, father of modern nationalism of the Oriyas and of modern Oriya literature. Young Fakirmohana at that time was no better than a schoolmaster at Balasore. But due to his erudition and brilliance of mind he was on very friendly terms with Mr John Beams, the British Civil Servant and linguist, who was then District Magistrate of Balasore. It was on the strength of opinions of British officers, such as Beams and T. E. Ravenshaw, then Commissioner of the Orissa Division, that Oriya, a language spoken by 17 million people, was saved from political death.

The story of Fakirmohana Senapati is indeed the story of the Renaissance of Oriya national life and of Oriya literature in the 19th century. We shall presently come to that. But the late start that the Oriyas made in the journey of modern progress as compared with her neighbours, is still having a crippling effect, and has produced psychological frustration in the Oriya mind. By 1857 the Bengalis had a University of their own, but the Oriyas had merely the humble beginnings of one or two English schools. The scattered Oriyas won a homogeneous State again after centuries of

[1] *History of Orissa*, Vol II, pp. 279-81

dismemberment only twenty years ago. They got a University of their own nearly a century after the Bengalis got theirs. All these disadvantages are being daily felt in all aspects of the national life in Orissa, including her literature.

CHAPTER XII

THE GREAT TRIO

FAKIRMOHANA SENAPATI

TILL the other day modern Oriya literature was lovingly spoken of as the Age of Radhanatha in contrast to the Ages of Sarala Dasa, Jagannatha Dasa, and of Upendra Bhanja. It was a spontaneous tribute to the inexplicable magic of poetry over other forms of literature. But the facts and movements of the sixty years, from about the sixties of the last century to the twenties of this, having become more readily available in recent years, have brought about a change of values in literature in the minds of readers and critics, and the consensus of opinion in Orissa now accords the place of eponymous pride to Saraswati Fakirmohana Senapati.

As a matter of fact, three men of genius ushered in the modern period in Oriya literature, working together round about 1866. This brilliant trio, with harmonious intellectual and spiritual affinities, and on excellent social terms with one another, is Fakirmohana Senapati, Radhanatha Ray and Madhusudana Rao. Of the three, Fakirmohana was the oldest and Madhusudana the youngest. Fakirmohana was the real inspirer of the group. He had absolutely no ambition to blossom out as a poet or a writer. He dared not entertain such aspirations *vis-a-vis* the other two who were well versed in English and bore the hall-mark of higher education. Senapati had no more than a primary school education. But he was a born patriot and humanitarian and was determined from his early days to do whatever lay in his power to raise the prestige of his fallen compatriots and lift them from the morass of sloth, despair and exploitation. He adopted literature as an experimental means to that great end. His extraordinary creative powers were revealed only as he went on writing miscellaneously. The actual creative contributions on which stands his immortality belong really to the 20th century, and were written long after Radhanatha and Madhusudana had

exhausted themselves. His long life of over eighty years was a blessing to the nation. Radhanatha and Madhusadana, born after him, died earlier. It was in his peaceful garden-house (*Santikanan*) at Balasore, in the golden twilight of his mature years, that all unexpectedly, Senapati gave to the nation great works year after year almost till his death, putting into them the quintessence of experience and observation of a brilliant mind during a long life.

Down to the sixties of the last century, Balasore was an important port of call and entrepot on the east coast of India for the sailing ships of the East India Company. Round about the middle of the century a semi-literate, sickly lad of twelve years or so, with a quill-pen tucked behind his right ear, might often have been seen walking up and down the quayside of this port, his hometown. Orphaned at the age of a year and a half, this lad, the impecunious scion of a once-noble family whose landed fortunes had changed hands with the departure of the Marathas and the advent of the British in Orissa, was being looked after by his doting old grandmother. He had been withdrawn from the village primary school on account of extreme poverty and made to earn his living by watching the repair of sails and rigging on behalf of his uncle who was one of the many contractors for such jobs on the quayside.

The penniless, orphaned, unpromising, semi-literate and sickly boy was Fakirmohana Senapati. He was born in 1847 and is now accepted as the Father of modern Oriya literature. As poet, novelist, administrator, scholar, social reformer, printer, journalist, businessman, and patriot he had a romantic career that appears stranger even than the grand fiction with which he has so abundantly enriched his language. This genius had only about two years' formal education to his credit, but became later an erudite scholar in at least four or five Indian languages, including Sanskrit. He acquired also an excellent working knowledge of English, all by his own efforts. Through sheer mental brilliance, efficiency and other outstanding abilities, this semi-educated man made intimate friendships with Britishers of the highest rank and became the Dewan of several of the ex-native states of Orissa. Born and brought up in a medieval environment, he was

remarkably receptive to modern ideas. Unassociated with the Government in any way, Fakirmohana, all by himself, was the pioneer in propaganda for the co-operative movement which was just reaching this country from the West. He was the first among the Oriyas to set up a printing press and publish a journal as a private enterprise and that too on modern jointstock basis, taking the then British Commissioner of Orissa Division as one of the shareholders. He says in his autobiography that on the day his printing press began to operate at Balasore, the entire bazar closed down and half the Government officials took casual leave to see the miracle. For many days, rich folk from the countryside came in palanquins to see Senapati's printing press in action—the first in the whole of Orissa outside Cuttack.

Wherever he was, Senapati made a mark as an administrator also, cleverly tackling many a knotty problem of revenue administration, inter-state disputes, personal problems of the chiefs, even quelling revolts and rebellions. When he was Assistant Manager of Keonjhar State (now Keonjhar district, celebrated for its extremely rich minerals) the Bhuyans, an ancient tribe peculiar to the State, rose in rebellion. The Raja fled to Cuttack, leaving his family in the state capital to shift for themselves. But Fakirmohana, always lion-hearted though physically weak, stayed on in the interest of the Rani and other ladies in the palace. To forestall attacks on the palace by the tribals that were expected every day, Senapati, true to his family surname which means 'general', collected a ragged battalion of the State militia that had long forgotten warfare, and marched with them on an elephant to meet the rebels in their jungle hold-out. But betrayed by the scout he had relied on, he was entrapped in a mountain pass by the rebels, numerically far superior and with superior dispositions on both sides of the mountain. He was taken and imprisoned in the jungle headquarters of the rebels and might easily have lost his head but for his mother wit. He told the silly-headed rebel chief that he was sure to win and that he, Fakirmohana, would assist him in the administration when he got the gaddi of Keonjhar. After winning the rebels' complete confidence he obtained the chief's permission to send a message to his personal

servant asking for a supply of pan and areca nut, which was not easily available in that deep jungle and to which both Senapati and the rebel chief were addicts. The letter was ingeniously worded like this:

'This is to inform Bholanath, my agent, that he must somehow despatch at least one hundred leaves of betel and two hundred pieces of betal nut. He should also have a ditch cut from the north to irrigate the sugarcane field, otherwise the sugar crop will be lost altogether.'

This letter, coming from the missing Assistant Manager, soon reached the hands of the authorities. Fakirmohana had closed the letter with three bits of wire. That was interpreted as a suggestion to send wires to Government. The ditch from the north was understood correctly as a request to bring Government forces from the district of Singhbhum in the north. The betal leaves were understood to be soldiers and the betel nuts to be bullets or guns. Action was accordingly taken and the rebellion was quelled in a few days.

Senapati's Autobiography

Much of this highly romantic and exciting career would have remained completely unknown to posterity, had not Fakirmohana, yielding to the persistent persuasion of his friends and admirers, consented to write his autobiography during the sunset of his life at Balasore. This *Atmacharita* is as interesting as any book of fiction. It may safely be taken to be one of the few really great autobiographies in the whole of Indian literature. Here are a few lines from an early chapter in which he describes the golden age of India that is lost for ever in spite of Bapuji's life-long struggle to restore it.

'In those days, the salary of Government officers in the Collectorate ranged from three to ten rupees only. But with that the people lived happily. Goods in daily use were cheap indeed. Here are some instances: Rice, 1½ maunds per rupee; Moong dal 10 as. per maund; oil, 7 seers per rupee; ghee 3 seers per rupee; fish 1 to 2 seers for just one payasa. Only the rich and the upper class officers wore the fine cloth that was being manufactured at Balasore. People in the moffusil used rough home-spun, spinning their own yarn. Only those

who had no ladies at home to spin purchased clothes from the market. In the countryside everybody had a small cotton plantation in their backyard and everybody in the family possessed a charkha. The yarn was handed over to local weavers who made the required cloth at the rate of a pice per cubit.'

Fakirmohana lived up to the good old age of eighty, honoured by all sections of the people. As a mark of gratitude for his deathless contributions to the nation, he was elected President of the Utkal Sammilani at its second session. This was an unusual and unique honour for a man of letters. His well-planned garden house at Balasore is now a place of pilgrimage for Oriyas. He died in 1918.

His Works

As has already been said, Fakirmohana seems to have been quite innocent of the ambition for literary fame. He acted according to the exigencies of the occasion. Authorship for him was far from a planned career.

His fame now solidly rests on his novels. But for thirty years before his first novel, he wrote poetry incessantly. The prose that he wrote in this period was confined to a few text-books. To meet the lack of text-books in Oriya when the first few schools were started, young Senapati busied himself to save the prestige of his mother-tongue and produced biographies, a highly entertaining History of India in two volumes, even a book on arithmetic, getting sumptuous rewards from Government for all. Barring these, however, his literary output during the three decades, from 1866 when his first text-book appeared up to 1902 when his first full-length novel was published in book form, was an enormous amount of poetry. Not to speak of numerous other pieces, Senapati translated single-handed the whole of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* from the original Sanskrit into Oriya verse, just to beguile the melancholy hours of his second wife after the loss of their first child. This is indeed an amazing feat of both physical and mental labour for one man to perform—labour that is generally the life-work of an entire team! The Senapati *Ramayana* and four of the 18 Parvas of the *Mahabharata* were published and were

very popular with the educated people of Orissa of those days. Efforts are now afoot to reprint these translations.

Besides these epics, he made special verse translations of the *Chhandogya* and other Upanishads, of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Hari-vamsa* also and wrote out in popular verse the fundamental principles of the co-operative movement. He wrote, late in life, an epic as well on the Buddha.

His first original poem *Utkala Bhramanam* (Tours of Orissa) appeared in 1892. It is not a travel-book really but an unusually unorthodox and humorous survey of the contemporary personalities in Orissa's public life, with praise, admiration, satire and condemnation distributed duly to each. It was written at a stretch while the poet was travelling on elephant back on an official journey and, when published soon after, took Orissa by storm. The authorship was kept anonymous at the beginning but discerning readers easily discovered who the author was. Fifty years after it still remains as entertaining as it was to contemporary readers.

His other original poems published in different anthologies are 'Pushpa-mala' (The garland), 'Upahar' (Gifts), 'Abasar-basare' (Days of idleness), 'Pujaphula' (Flowers of worship), 'Prarthana' (Prayer) and 'Dhuli' (Dust grains). Numerous as they are, these poems seldom reach great heights, but their naive simplicity, flowing felicity of versification and their depth of sincerity cannot fail to touch the hearts of readers. Their variety and range, considering the poet's lack of formal education, is indeed amazing. They include excellent story-poems for children, satires on dead customs, poems on natural objects, hymns and prayers, poems on the eternal questions of life as also on famous personalities, and incidents of international history. The excellent short and long poems in these collections, those on Josephine, Jesus Christ, the Rape of Lucretia, Cleopatra, Tukaram and on the Russo-Japanese war of 1905 clearly display an unusually liberal mind. His friends, Radhanatha and Madhusudana, in spite of their western education which Fakirmohana lacked, have not dared to go beyond Orissa or India for subjects for their literary creations. They stuck to 'poetic' topics only. But Senapati lifted all manner of subjects under the sun into the charmed sphere of poetry. If he is the greatest novelist of

the common man in Orissa he is also the greatest poet of the common thing.

In this motley poetic crowd, however, the poems written in memory of his second wife, the virtuous Krishnakumari for whose beguilement he translated both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, clearly stand out as great, warm with the tears of a devoted, admiring and disconsolate husband. The dedicatory piece to *Pushpa-mala* (The garland) may kindle noble passion in the hearts of true lovers anywhere in the world. Here are the first few lines.

> Beautiful Krishnakumari, the queen of my cottage,
> Eternal sweetheart, dear as life and my constant companion!
> You, the apple of my eye, have departed from me,
> Leaving your virtues intermingled in the blood of my heart.
> Never have I come across a more virtuous Lady than your good self
> Never a wife more faithful to her lord.
> The full moon have I often watched in the blue heavens,
> The pearls of dew on roses and lotuses in full bloom,
> But these are not so beautiful as were your tears
> That I saw flow when you were in communion with the Divine.
> I feel now as though that peaceful face and those quiet closed eyes of yours
> Have spread over the firmament.
> At night, when the world was quiet and we two
> Sat on the terrace or in the garden,
> And saw the moon and the stars up above
> Float away in the sky, shedding heavenly light all round,
> I felt that we two
> Were like twin Stars up in the sky above.

The poems 'She departed with smiles but left me disconsolate with tears', or 'Shall I see that smiling face again?' or 'Can anybody tell me where my companion is gone?' are vibrant with the deep-felt emotion and the great love that only a poet's soul is capable of.

The poet has said in so many words that after the passing

away of this great woman who happened to be his second wife, life was a desolate desert for him and he bewails that he survives her—which he did a good number of years.

His Novels and Stories

During his long and chequered career Senapati used to write short stories off and on and publish them in periodicals. They are not many, but each is a gem and reveals a strange new world. Two of them, relating to sea-trade at Balasore, are without parallel in Oriya. Born at Balasore, Fakirmohana was familiar with the sailing ships in his boyhood days, so that we feel the tumult of waves and smell the brine in these stories. In others we meet just simple country folk, or those upstarts who, under the false light of westernism, started hating all that was native and came to grief. His first short story 'Lachhmania' was published in a local magazine at Balasore in 1868 and is supposed by some to have been among the first modern short stories in Indian languages. The story 'Patent medicine' provides rollicking fun by describing how a good lady brought her erring husband to his senses with her broomstick, as a desperate measure. 'Ananta, the widow's spoilt darling' is a fine story of the only son of a virago of a widow. Through the indulgence of his mother he turned out a nuisance to all and sundry in the village, the village teacher not excluded, but when the village was menaced with flood it was he, the loafer, that threw himself into the breach of the river embankment with a hastily wrenched-off door on his head, and inspired the assembled villagers to throw sods of earth as quickly as possible round about him. The villagers, in their enthusiasm, worked like blind furies, the bund was restored, but it was discovered too late that the widow's only son had quietly allowed himself to be buried alive in order to save the village. The mother swept to the scene like a storm and disappeard into the swirling river.

All the other stories of Senapati, like these two, have a unique character of their own, each revealing an unsuspected dark corner of society. The stories, on the whole, are not personal so much as social, coloured with humour and dignified with a subtle moral.

Senapati's novels appear as the natural development of his story-writing. The strong individualistic style which made him unique among contemporary writers and popular with the general reader, was fruitfully developed in his stories through a long period. This style Senapati used spontaneously while dealing with the common folk. But his pen was also capable of writing in as grand a manner as any, if and when the occasion arose. The way he put the speech of the common folk to unexpected and effective use will forever remain a literary miracle. That Senapati did not have a good formal education was a great blessing to him as well as to his language. Nobody could have even imagined the folk speech of Orissa to be worthy of literary use if Senapati had not used it so successfully. Compared to the over-Sanskritised style of Bankimchandra, the Bengali novelist and almost a contemporary of Fakirmohana, his adoption of the scorned common speech as a literary vehicle was certainly a daring literary adventure.

Like his style, Senapati drew the characters for his stories and novels also out of the common depressed multitude. This undoubtedly entitles him to be called the first proletarian writer in modern India. He anticipates Premchand's *Godan*, for example, by more than half a century, in his *Chhamana athaguntha*[1] (Six acres and eight decimals). This novel is a masterpiece of realistic fiction, depicting the sad victimisation of an innocent couple of weavers by the village money-lender. The story in outline is this:

Ramachandra Mangaraja was a poor orphaned boy of the village Sarsandha in the district of Cuttack. Entering into petty business in his childhood he determined, as a sort of revenge for his misfortunes, to be rich at any cost. His village belonged to an estate whose Moslem landlord was living a dissipated life in distant Bengal, never visiting his rural estate but demanding regular payments to maintain his luxury. The wily Mangaraja succeeded through subterfuges in becoming the sole rent-collector of the estate, a very important office in a rural area. And in a few years, he completely outwitted his master, and got the estate for

[1] Selected by the Sahitya Akademi for translation into all other Indian languages.

himself by paying the arrear rent at an auction. Not content with that, Mangaraja in his mad craze for aggrandizement started acquiring land and other properties from all sorts of people by fair means or foul. He became the biggest money-lender in the area and the hardest-hearted at that. In a village close to Mangaraja's, there was an old settlement of weavers. They had as hereditary headman one Bhagia, a simple soul, who had some six acres and eight decimals of land for his honorarium. Simpler still was his wife Saria. They had no children and the object of Saria's intense love and devotion was Neta, a lovely black cow. Mangaraja's evil eyes fell on Bhagia's six acres and eight decimals of land, the most fertile and consolidated piece of paddy fields in the area, now adjacent to his own ever-increasing fields. Champa, a devil of a woman, was Mangaraja's maidservant and conscience-keeper. Engaged by Mangaraja to bring simple Bhagia and Saria under his control so as to get their fertile land, this woman made overtures to childless Saria, raising hopes in the simple woman of having a child if she persuaded her husband to build a small temple to the village goddess (who was lying beneath a banyan tree). Champa easily caught the simple weaver couple in her net. They mortgaged their six acres and eight decimals of land to Mangaraja to obtain the funds needed for the temple. But soon came demands for repayment of the loan. Saria's dear little cow was snatched away to pay interest alone. Saria, in despair, went to Mangaraja's house and lay down on his back verandah, refusing to take food. This did not move the stony heart of the money-lender and Saria died of starvation. And Bhagia turned mad in these tragic circumstances. The police came to investigate Saria's death and arrested Mangaraja. After a trial he was sentenced to hard labour. But one day mad Bhagia somehow got out of the asylum which, in those days, was inside the jail and, catching sight of Mangaraja, tried to bite off his nose and limbs. Mangaraja was seriously hurt and developed high fever. He was released from the jail to die ultimately in the courtyard of his own empty and deserted house, repeating over and over again these last half-articulate words: 'Six acres, eight decimals', 'Six acres, eight decimals'.

During the absence of Mangaraja in jail, Champa, the wicked maidservant, having cleverly secured the keys from her master as he was being led away by the police, collected all the money and jewels she could carry and, taking Govinda, a barber servant of the house as her escort and the sharer of the loot, left for an unknown destination. At a lonely wayside inn, they stopped for a night and started quarrelling about which of them most deserved the loot. Govinda was no match for Champa in a battle of words. He sat sullen outside, refusing food. At midnight he took out his razor and murdered sleeping Champa and taking the bundle of money and jewellery ran to the river ghat to escape in a ferry boat. While the boat was in midstream, dawn came and the boatman's eyes fell upon the blood stains on Govinda's clothing and he began to question him closely. In the meantime the postal runner was seen on the opposite bank. Apprehending certain arrest Govinda jumped into the river, with all the ill-gotten money and valuables of Ramacanhdra Mangaraja, never to rise again.

His *Prayaschitta* (Expiation) is a picture of the tragedy that came upon a new-fangled English-educated youth through his nonchalant defiance of the old order of things in India. His *Mamu* (Uncle) is another picture-gallery illustrating the battle of good and evil and the ultimate redemption of a fallen soul through repentance. His *Lachhma* is a historical novel bringing to life the horrors of Maratha depredations in Bengal and Orissa in the 18th century. In and through the political and military manoeuvres of the opposing war-lords in this book, Senapati has cleverly woven the romantic career of lovely Lachhma, an up-country girl, who lost her entire family at the hands of the Bargi highwaymen, while on pilgrimage to Puri. Her trials and tribulations fill the reader's mind with deep compassion and when at last, at a strategic moment which she had contrived, she kills the notorious Bargi leader Bhaskar Pandit, the reader's mind fills with admiration for her.

Taken as a whole, the novels of Fakirmohana cover about a century of pre-British and post-British Orissa. The gradual metamorphosis is clearly visible in his pages to

any student of sociology. But its value is not merely chronological. Senapati had the rare gift of great writers, that of blowing life into his characters. Objectively judged, his novels must appear to any discerning reader to suffer from looseness of construction. The plots were not very well-knit and the building-up shows signs of hurried and even haphazard work. But all that is amply made up for by the extraordinarily clever and creative sculpturing. In the arena of his story we see men and women marvellously alive, as they move—men and women just like ourselves or like those whom we have so often met in our day-to-day life. That speaks well indeed for the perennial charm of his novels and their verisimilitude to life, although nearly half a century has already passed since they were written.

The novels of Senapati have an appeal also for their high spiritual quality. They were written in the author's mature years. So, we miss in them the youthful romance that is the core of many masterpieces in world literature, but they are splendid love stories all the same. We also come across terrible crimes. In *Chhaman athaguntha* there is the murder already mentioned and its trial. The depiction of both is so graphic that when the novel came out serially in the monthly magazine 'Utkala Sahitya', people from the countryside ran to witness the supposed trial with their own eyes in the law-court at Cuttack. There are similar crimes in other novels too. But these novels are not merely crime and punishment, but error and redemption. The personalities err, realise their mistakes and try to expiate through repentance and grace. Senapati never misses an opportunity to bring to our notice the presence of the Divine in human affairs. At appropriate places and situations in both *Mamu* and *Prayaschitta*, he arranges illuminating discussions on the eternal verities of life, which immediately raise the mere stories to the level of the great life of which the world's masterpieces in literature are made. And like all other master-minds Senapati, even in the presence of the Divine, could also laugh heartily. He had an uncanny awareness of the hypocritical, the sham and the absurd in life. People in Orissa generally read his novels and stories to have a hearty laugh, besides, of course, to enjoy the

story. His novels are sublime through the common humour of life.

Thomas Hardy of Orissa

With his masterly handling of rustic speech, his dealing mostly with the common folk, closely attached to nature and the soil, but making the universal real to us even through these illiterate ragamuffins, Senapati reminds us, among western novelists, of Thomas Hardy whose part-contemporary he was. Like Hardy Senapati was both a poet and a novelist and like Hardy he wrote masterpieces of fiction using genuine low characters from the rural and urban areas. But the big difference between Senapati and any other important literary hero is that here was a man who both saved a language and enriched it like a master-craftsman, although he at no time in his life entertained any ambition for fame as a great writer. His only dream, throughout his life, was to serve the people among whom he was born.

For having translated both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* single-handed, and also for his versatility in the wide world of letters, readers in Orissa dubbed Fakirmohana as Vyasa-Kavi. Later on, the Durbar of Bamanda State, famous for literary culture, also conferred on him the enviable title of Saraswati. Hence he is generally known in Orissa as Saraswati Fakirmohana. Few indeed deserve such a title as much as he did. His only shortcoming was that he was born with terrible handicaps for a writer, and that too in a backward state.

RADHANATHA RAY

His Life

Radhanatha was born of cultured parents in the village of Kedarpur in north Balasore in 1848. He was sickly all through his life and had to give up advanced studies in Calcutta, away from home, for that reason. He was the first boy to pass the Matriculation examination of the newly established Calcutta University in the whole district of Balasore and when, so says Fakirmohana in his autobiography, the wonderful news reached the Balasore Collectorate

where his father Sundara Ray was a clerk, the latter's semi-literate colleagues started whispering among themselves that if that sickly boy of Sundara Babu could pass the Matriculation examination, then it was not as wonderful a feat as they had imagined it to be! Radhanatha entered life as a teacher in a Government School and on account of his efficiency rose up and up in the official hierarchy, retiring as a Divisional Inspector of Schools. In his private life Radhanatha was a prince among men, humble in spite of great learning and still greater literary fame, unobtrusive and quiet. He was almost deified by contemporary society for his innumerable secret charities and his other great qualities of head and heart.

Late in life the poet suffered a moral lapse, and its reaction on his sensitive mind, till then uncontaminated, was so violent that he almost outraged social decency by making it a public affair by the distribution of a confessional tract. He has left hot tears of remorse and repentance also in his poem, 'To a faithful wife from a faithless husband'.

Radhanatha was very well read in several languages and was admired both for his scholarship and his poetic talents by many of his famous contemporaries in Bengal. The Bengali poet Nabin Chandra Sen, and Bhudeva Mukhopadhyaya, the famous educationist and thinker, have left fine eulogistic poems on him.

When Radhanatha was about 20 and was at Balasore as Deputy Inspector of Schools, Madhusudana Rao, his former student and favourite at the Zilla School of Puri, came also to Balasore to work as a teacher in the Government High School there. Fakirmohana was already there, the restless leader of all sorts of movements for the uplift of his people. The three together ushered in the new era in Oriya literature round about 1866.

Orissa's Lyrical Ballads

Contrary to the dreams of a section of Bengali officials, the Government, as a result of the popular agitation organised by Gourisankara Ray (brother of Ramasankara Ray, the pioneer novelist and dramatist) at Cuttack and by young Fakirmohana Senapati and the now forgotten Govinda

Chandra Patnaik at Balasore, ordered the discontinuation of the study of Bengali in all schools and its replacement by the compulsory study of Oriya all over the Orissa Division. But there were no text-books in Oriya available at that time. The three friends at once set about removing the deficiency. Fakirmohana wrote and published books on history and arithmetic and Radhanatha and Madhusudana tried their hands at literature.

Their co-operative product, *Kabitabali*, is comparable to the 'Lyrical Ballads', produced jointly by Wordsworth and Coleridge, which ushered in a new age in English literature in the late 18th century. In this slender volume, the majority of the small poems were from the pen of Madhusudana, but there is no doubt that in this adventure both the teacher and the pupil suddenly discovered themselves as original poets. Before this, Radhanatha had only published the Oriya translation of Kalidasa's *Meghadutam*. A finer and more musical translation of that great Sanskrit classic it may be difficult to find in any Indian language. And in *Benisamhara*, a long narrative poem on a well-known incident from the *Mahabharata* which appeared in *Kabitabali* as one of Radhanatha's three contributions, we see clearly the budding of the fine narrative poet that he ultimately became.

Great Narrative and National Poet

Radhanatha is essentially a narrative poet, a *kavya*-maker *par excellence*. He, in fact, may be taken as a modernised Upendra Bhanja whose superior he is supposed to be by his admirers. As a matter of fact, stormy controversies raged for a time in Orissa's literary circles round this imaginary poetic rivalry between dead Upendra and living Radhanatha. Radhanatha, in true humility, made a public statement that he himself was a student and admirer of Upendra's poetry.

For over half a century Radhanatha's *kavyas* were definitely more popular in Orissa than even the novels of Fakirmohana Senapati. The secret lay in the fact that Ray's *kavyas* were also highly entertaining fiction, presented in the magic casket of alluring poetry. He wrote like Upendra

Bhanja and his followers but with significant departures and innovations. While the *kavyas* of Upendra and his followers were dictional and metrical exercises and displayed conventional sentiments, those of Radhanatha had the galvanism of genuine young love and warm lyrical quality. The tales he introduced were absolutely new, much closer to reality than those of the medieval *kavya*-makers, and yet no less romantic. The background to these new tales was modern and familiar to the educated, and in and through the narration the poet touched, at appropriate moments, the new chords of patriotism in the hearts of the Oriyas—something the ancients and the medievalists had not cared for, except Sarala Dasa in a rough sort of way. And with all the delights of a medieval romance as abundantly provided in a *kavya* of Radhanatha as in any of Bhanja's, the reader was spared the bother of constantly referring to a glossary or a dictionary to get the meaning. Radhanatha wrote his romantic poems like Scott and Tennyson, for the common reader, unlike Bhanja and his followers who expressly wrote for the 'learned, the élite, and those who could understand'. These were the new qualities that made Radhanatha as popular in modern Orissa as any great medieval poet. He became the darling equally of the dry-as-dust pandit and the fresh young bride behind the purdah. Perhaps no other modern poet in India has had the popularity that has been enjoyed by Radhanatha with the exception of Tagore in Bengal.

Radhanatha took his stories from many sources—the mythologies of Greece and Rome, the Puranas, and the oral tradition as well as the history of Orissa. The way he metamorphosed the foreign tales into Orissan stories is indeed a marvel. Practically all his *kavyas* have the Orissan landscape as their stage. Though Orissa is one of the most picturesque states in India, the Oriya poets in old and medieval times had no eye for the natural magnificence on their door-step—the sea, the romantic hills of Meghasana, Mahendra and Malyagiri, the broad rivers, the primordial forests, and the lovely lakes of their own land. Engrossed with 'holiness' only, as derived from Rama and Krishna stories, they sang *ad nauseum* of the places and objects of nature associated with

those divine heroes which they had never seen with their own eyes—the river Yamuna or the Govardhana hill or Naimisaranya for example. For the first time in the whole history of Oriya literature, nature in Orissa spoke and became an integral part of Orissa's national consciousness through the modern romantic poetry of Radhanatha. As a poet of nature Radhanatha has done for Orissa what Kalidasa did for India, putting the geography and the topography of his homeland to splendid poetic use. As the Greeks did in respect of the Hellenic world, Radhanatha peopled the whole of Orissa with living gods and goddesses who took as lively an interest in human affairs. He endowed innumerable little spots in Orissa with significant living personalities of their own. He made Orissa, in short, a land of superb poetic beauty, a theatre for supernatural beings, a land of myths and legends, of handsome fighting heroes and lovely heroines. There is not a single celebrated mountain, river, lake, or historic or religious monument in Orissa which has not had a magical poetic baptism from Radhanatha's pen. Almost anywhere a sensitive, educated Oriya moves, a few lines of Radhanatha's poetry come naturally to his lips, aptly revealing the essence of the place he finds himself in. Radhanatha was almost worshipped in his time as the true national poet of Orissa, most deservedly.

The Story of Chandrabhaga

As an illustration of his eclectic craftsmanship and his extraordinary talent for myth-making, I would like to describe here the story of *Chandrabhaga*, one of the smallest but most charming of his early poems. It is the story of Apollo and Daphne, completely Indianised and based on the ruined temple of the Sun-god at Konaraka.

On the full moon day of the month of Pausha, all the heavenly as well as the terrestrial gods and goddesses came to the shrine of Jagannatha to pay their homage to the 'Lord of the Universe'. They found Kamadeva, the Hindu Cupid, standing at the gate. They all kowtowed to him, for who was not afraid of the silly pranks of that mischievous boy? The last to arrive was the Sun-god 'Surya', with his nine planets. Completely ignoring the presence of Kamadeva

at the gate, he went straight in. This infuriated Kama, who decided to take vengeance on the haughty Surya, who had the false self-confidence, perhaps, to think himself immune from Cupid's shafts.

Not far from the temple of Surya at Konaraka, there lived a saint named Sumanyu in a lonely hermitage on the seashore. His only child was the daughter Chandrabhaga—a beauteous maiden who, in the innocence of youth, freely roamed about the sandy solitude. Under the spell cast by Cupid, the poor Sun-god, while getting out from his magnificent temple one day on his daily aerial journey, saw Chandrabhaga playing on the beach alone, and unable to control himself, ran after her in the form of a handsome human youth, appealing for her love. The girl, used only to the company of her saintly father, fled in fear from this strange suitor. Pursued by the Sun-god, she ran on and on, until, realising an escape to be impossible any longer, she plunged into the sea and disappeared. Disappointed and repentant, Surya returned to his temple, but was aghast to find his magnificent shrine in ruins, as a result of a curse for his crime, from Sumanyu, Chandrabhaga's hermit- father who in the meantime had come to know all that had happened.

This is the charming little story of the enchanting little lyrical-narrative poem of Chandrabhaga by Radhanatha. Actually the river Chandrabhaga (now silted up) once flowed past the Sun temple at Konaraka. The action of the Sun's rays on the water-surface of this river as it merged itself into the sea, might have been the basis also of this beautiful legend. Anyway, this clearly indicates how sensitive Radhanatha's imagination was in humanising nature myths or legends of far-off lands and times, absorbing them into romantic and colourful Orissan scenes.

Similarly, his other vivacious narrative poem 'Usha' is the story of Atalanta and the three golden apples, and the romantically pathetic 'Kedargauri' is that of Pyramus and Thisbe, both so naturally and artistically merged into Orissan society and landscape as to look as though they had actually happened here originally. Places have by now become celebrated in Orissa, because Radhanatha made them the sites of his romances.

The Nature Worshipper

But it is not as a poetic story-teller only that Radhanatha's special contribution to Oriya literature has to be judged. He was innately a devoted admirer of nature for her own sake. This element in him gave a real, precious novelty to Oriya literature, this love of nature for her own make, a great spiritual quality, absolutely different from man's love for a woman. In the latter an elemental passion for possession and pleasure lies always hidden. Most oriental literatures practically overflow with it. Radhanatha introduced an illuminating and ennobling quality into a literature that was earthly with the desires and consummation of the sensuous, possessive, physical delight, except for a few rare pieces such as in the poetry of, say, Gopalakrishna. As Inspector of Schools, Radhanatha travelled widely and came in close touch with the wild, unharnessed and grand natural scenery of Orissa. He was shaken to his soul in wonder and admiration. To satisfy this keen new-found appetite for nature's charms, he also travelled all over India from the Himalayas down to Cape Comorin, taking long leave from Government work. When he returned with all that wonderful experience and saw the Chilka lake—the lake of beauty and wealth in Orissa—he burst into ecstatic poetry. It was as though he had never seen anything more beautiful before. So he says, in *Chilka*[1] his loveliest nature-poem; and compares the lovely little Chilka to a coy maiden companion, in contrast with the vast seas and the mighty Himalayas, in whose overpowering presence one feels one's individual entity practically lost. And not in *Chilka* alone, but in his other poems also, big and small, we find similar heartening and intimate touches of nature in illuminating word-pictures. Radhanatha is undoubtedly Orissa's greatest landscape painter in poetry.

But Radhanatha was not only a story-teller or a word-painter of nature or of beautiful women, though these are not very common powers in poetry even if detractors think any poetaster could have them all—and all through his life Radhanatha had some persistent detractors in Orissa from

[1] Already translated into all other Indian languages by the Sahitya Akademi. 'Chilka' is the anglicised form. Radhanatha's poem is named 'Chilika' which is the Oriya form.

motives other than literary or aesthetic. This is most regrettable. Almost alone in the long history of Oriya literature, Radhanatha had the courage of genius to defy privilege and ruthlessly whip the powerful with his pen for their shortcomings. He is to be saluted for the fact that behind his quiet, cultured, humble and gentle exterior he kept the holy fire of righteous indignation burning. He aimed fiery arrows at the perpetrator of any human indignity that came to his notice from any quarter. This, I think, is integral—this holy fire—to all true genius. Radhanatha has revealed it in all his books, but in a concentrated form in the *Durbar*, where through satire, taunt, and direct condemnation he has torn to pieces the contemporary Rajas, Maharajas and such other glorified nincompoops who dominated society in his time as they do in all ages. He sets off against them the poor, indebted and sickly genius of the great Oriya astronomer, Samanta Chandrasekhara Simha.[1] He was the only one worthy of admiration, in the whole durbar of padded nothingnesses that temporary beaurocrats and dignitaries often are. The soulful tribute that the poet pays to the great astronomer should be the envy of any genius, and in the dignity of its diction, the width of its vision, and in the whole heartedness of its praise, this encomium rises to the heights of great poetry, becoming much more than a personal topic.

The Mahayatra

Radhanatha's *magnum opus* is (or was to be, as he planned it) the epic *Mahayatra* (the Great Journey). It is the journey to heaven of the Pandavas, on which they set out after all was over with them on this earth. Radhanatha planned to complete this epic in thirty cantos, but there are now only seven cantos available. Rumour has it that the poet had actually finished twenty-one cantos, but (in spite of his being a Government servant) there was so much anti-British sentiment in the last few cantos, that the matter somehow came to the ear of the British authorities. The poet thereupon burnt the suspected portions and published the present incomplete

[1] Mentioned in the chapter on Orissa's contribution to Sanskrit literature (Chap. XV)

version. Like Milton in the *Paradise Lost*, Radhanatha takes the Pandavas from Puri to the heights of the Sahyadri, the Western Ghats, in their itinerary of holy places in India, before they ascend the Himalayas, and there, through the divine vision provided by Agni, the fire-god, he unfolds before them the panorama of Indian history. The deterioration of the Aryans as a race under the spell of Kali, leading to the occupation of India by Moslem invaders, is the main theme of the epic in its incomplete form. It ends in the midst of the first battle of Panipat. The stirring speech of Amarsi, the Hindu General, to his wavering army is unforgettable:

Is this the land of the Aryas? And are you the sons and inheritors of the land of that noble race? Does the blood of those who refused to part with as much land as can be covered by the point of a needle, without fight, flow in your veins? .... Alas, who can say why God entrusted this noble land, so wonderfully protected by nature with these gigantic Himalayas, to the hands of cowards like you? Alas, can it be possible that the jackal enter the lion's den, snatch food from the lion's mouth and go away after kicking him, and the lion stand it?

The whole epic is written in the finest of grand manners; in vigorous and sonorous blank-verse. The descriptions of battle engagements and of the different aspects of nature and the plight of degenerate Indian society are in the true epic style. Even in its incompleteness, this book is as grand as Konaraka in ruins.

RADHANATHA'S PROSE

Radhanatha wrote prose also in a style all his own, clear, precise, yet colourful and full of keen observation. His *Viveki* (the Man of Conscience), in spite of its archaic style, is the finest book yet in Oriya, of day-to-day ethics. His *Last part of the Parvati* (which he could not complete in verse and finished in prose) is pure poetry. The present writer has read the book times without number for sheer aesthetic enjoyment, and he cannot resist the temptation of presenting here

just a little of the medieval pageantry of Orissa described in it when the tyrant-king Gangesvara Deva returns victorious to Puri after a scandalous expedition. The faithful palace eunuch (Kanchuki) shows the feudal notables of the empire to the noble Queen who, the same night, is to murder her immoral husband with her own hands. This is the *Parvati kavya* of Radhanatha, a powerful poem, with overflowing pathos of the deepest kind, and a soul-stirring romantic medieval atmosphere. It centres round an incestuous crime by an immoral king. Now for the pageantry—

Old Kanchuki and the Queen stood behind the topmost window of the palace and saw that as far as their eyes could travel, the main street of Puri glittered like gold with the reflections of the shields and coats of arms of the soldiery. And Kanchuki started to point out, one by one, the feudal chiefs who had joined in the procession from distant parts of the empire.

"Look, your Majesty, he who is the first in the procession and is seated in the howdah with the golden cupolas, on an elephant whose head is decorated with gold tassels, is the Brahmin king of Baudh. His fort lies in dense bamboo forests on the banks of the Mahanadi and is resonant with the ceaseless music of the waters of that great river as they strike against rocks in the river bed. In front of him goes his famous battalion of Khonds brandishing bows in one hand and hatchets in the other and dancing to music. They hail from valleys green with turmeric plantations, deep inside primordial forests. After him comes the Raja of Angul who resides in a hill-fort surrounded by elephant-filled forests. His country is famous for horses and his army consists mainly of cavalry and infantry. After him is the Chief of Talcher, the steps of whose forest-clothed palace are washed by the waters of the picturesque Brahmani river. Look at his banner, your Majesty, and see how it is painted with the picture of the fiery goddess Hingula. His bearded infantry are noted for skilful wielding of the spear. After him rides the Raja of Malyagiri, the highest mountain in the empire. When we invaded his fort he took shelter in the cloud-capped heights of the great mountain. And now see, your Majesty, there comes along the Raja of Banapura whose

soldiers have painted bodies and heads decorated with the red feathers of the flamingoes of the Chilka lake. He is the Lord of Chilka, the lake that abounds in fish and whose waves are furrowed day and night by his innumerable ships. He divides his days between his hill-forts and his water-forts beside the Chilka......"

MADHUSUDANA RAO, THE POET SAINT

If a traveller happens to stop at a school in any part of Orissa, he will hear prayers recited and hymns sung by the boys in the hostels after they have lighted their meagre oil-lamps in the evening. And sure enough he will find that one of the hymns ends with:

Lead me on the path of truth and piety, Oh Lord,
Bathe me with the showers of Thine love,
Be my Refuge great,
And accept the complete surrender of this life of mine
At Thine feet:

That is by Madhusudana Rao, Orissa's great modern spiritual poet, in the line of Jagannatha Dasa, Arakshita Dasa, and Bhima Bhoi. His songs, lyrics, odes, sonnets and essays have exercised an excellant purifying influence on the minds of young pupils of Orissa for the last 60 years or so. Passages of his poetry and prose are part of the make-up of the average cultured Oriya. Whatever Madhusudana wrote, from little couplets and quatrains in children's primers —a line in which he was most successful, born teacher that he was — to much more serious, literary and patriotic odes, hymns and sonnets, has a feeling and an atmosphere of purity and loftiness, breathing the air of high idealism and life divine. Because of this inherent dignity, even the A.B.C. Primer in Oriya (*Varnabodha*) that he compiled has become a classic of its kind. No change in methodology and no amount of new-fangled substitutes have been able to affect the popularity of Madhu Rao's *Varnabodha*, which has sold by the thousands every year for the last sixty years or so, initiating millions of Oriyas, decade after decade, into the

mysteries of the letters. And even in this A.B.C. Book the poet-saint puts lines as highly elevating as these into the ouths of the tiny tots:

> The great Lord of the world sees, every moment,
> Whatever I do and say and even think—
> I shall forever worship Him:
> He than whom there is no greater
> Is always with me:

Madhusudana was born in 1853, into a devout Hindu family in Puri. In early youth he became a Brahmo and, for about half a century, was not only the finest representative of that non-conformist faith in Orissa, but was associated with all the social and religious reforms in the land. He studied up to the First Arts examination of those days and started life as a teacher in a Government School, retiring as a Divisional Inspector of Schools, like his guru Radhanatha. He died in 1912. It was he who founded the Utkal Sahitya Samaj, now the only literary institute of Orissa with a house and office of its own. Two high schools, one at Cuttack and another at Bhubaneswara, the new capital of Orissa, are named after him.

We have already learnt before how, out of the physical proximity as well as the spiritual interaction of the three friends, Fakirmohana, Radhanatha and Madhusudana at Balasore, the new era of Oriya literature was ushered into existence and how in 1873 *Kabitabali* (Lyrical ballads), containing poems from both Radhanatha and Madhusudana, was published. The majority of the poems in this collection were by Madhusudana. Even these early poems indicated the nature of the poet's mind—he was not meant for the common soil, but for heavenly flights.

Madhusudana had no poetic ambition as such. He never attempted anything planned or voluminous. His works consist of a large number of small pieces, all written in response to the call of the occasion. He was essentially a preacher and a teacher, who made use of the literary vehicle for publicising his ideas, reflections and visions. Naturally, true inspiration is lacking in many of his poems, their main features

being high dignity of expression and the impact of a pure soul. But at times, the inspired mood did come. These were the moments when the saint's soul experienced its unity with the Divine it was searching for. In these rare moments the saint burst into magnificent poetry. His 'Rishi prane devavataran' (Descent of the Divine into the soul of a saint) and 'Himachale Udayoschhava' (Festival of sunrise in the Himalayas) are illustrations of such creative intuitions.

In the first of these two poems, for instance, the poet describes the workings in the mind of a Vedic saint who comes down to the river Satadru (Sutlej) for ablutions in the small hours of a full-moon night. The whole world is mystical with the fading moonbeams. A faint glimmer of the dawn is rising on the eastern horizon. Behind the saint tower the snowcapped, eternal Himalayas. In this world of mystic light and enveloping whiteness the saint, standing on the bank of the holy Satadru, has a mystic experience, the beatific vision of the world-soul interpenetrating his own, and the whole universe. And he bursts into a grand hymn, of which here are only a few lines in indifferent translation:

Who indeed art Thou, Oh Lord,
That are greater than the greatest,
And revealest Thyself in filling this my soul
And this vast universe with immortal light?
Art thou the Lord of this Earth and the Heavens
Whom the worlds worship in joy ecstatic?

The days, nights, seasons and years
And moments too all worship Thee.
Thou art the blazing fire of glory, and
He at whose command these white Himalays stand,
And he at whose impulsion the saints of yore
Worshipped nature as the symbol of thy power.

I percieve now that Thou art Lord of this soul too,
And Father and Mother as well, of the myriad creations.
Victory to Thee, All-beneficent God of Gods.
Source and embodiment of Truth and Beauty!
Welcome to Thee that radiatest immortality!
Penetrate Thou mine heart and let this mine soul entire
Resound with Thine holy words!

But Madhusudana was not a mere walker in the clouds. He was a practical teacher and educationist and was the maker of a host of good teachers in Orissa, as Principal of the Secondary Teachers' Training School at Cuttack for about two decades. Living in the spacious days of Queen Victoria, he believed in the progress of man, and he worked for it. His words, uttered at the start of this century, have not lost their value and significance in this still bungling world of ours:

> O Humanity, listen to the New Message of the New Times,
> Of the One Great Creator and His one human family,—
> Asia, Europe and Africa are now linked with America,
> Forming the Assembly of the World in accordance with the law of our Lord.
> Listen to words of amity and friendship,
> Uttered by the East and the West and the North and the South.

All this is written in a splendid, grand manner. When it was translated into Bengali, Tagore felt he heard the true Vedic accent in the lines of 'Rishi prane devavatarana'. All Madhusudana's famous odes, 'To the Sky,' 'To the Earth', 'To Sound', 'To the River', etc., possess the same dictional and spiritual loftiness. The first few stanzas of his ode 'To the Sky' strongly remind us of the Creation Hymn of the Rigveda:

> When this picturesque world was not,
> Nor the sun, the moon, nor the stars,
> Nor this Earth, the home of multiple life,
> And All was clothed with darkness,
>
> When Eternity had no ripples on it,
> And there was no happening in the sea of Time
> The creation was formless, without even the Idea,
> Merged in dense, total darkness;
>
> When the creative drama of life had not yet started,
> And the causeless Cause alone was awake,
> Beyond Time and Space and Mind and Speech,

Thou endless Ether, spread in vast expanse,
However, didst exist that time
Surrounding the all pervasive Primeval Darkness,
Coeval with the First cause,
To think of which vastness, this mind gets stilled indeed!

That is how the poet-saint generally sang—like an oracle, speaking the language of scriptures. For the purity of his life, scholarship and religious enthusiasm, Madhusudana was generally spoken of in Orissa as Bhakta-kavi and was almost worshipped in his time by the educated masses in Orissa.

Madhusudana was also the only sonneteer in Oriya in his times. All his sonnets were published together under the title of *Basant-gatha* or the 'Vernal Songs'. Technically they are all in the Petrarchian pattern, though no Laura is there to cast her magic spell on the readers. The subjects are reflections on nature and panegyrics to celebrities. Only a few give a glimpse of the poet's soul. The most celebrated of them all contains the following inspiring idea:

He who has not lost anything precious
Is indeed the destitute in this world,
And poorer still is the wretch
Who forgets the dear thing he has lost.

Wretchedest of all is he who,
Having lost something precious, tries to forget it.
But he is rich beyond measure who
Keeps burning the lamp of love
In the midst of the thick darkness of bereavement
And remembers the beloved in night-long vigils.

Madhusudana's prose, mostly to be found in the essays in his text-books (these were the only literary Readers in Orissa for generations) was once accepted as the norm for good literary style. But now it has been discarded as antiquated and stylised, though its old-world elegance and dignity are beyond dispute in the cultural world.

Madhusudana has left an excellent translation of *Uttararama-charita* of Bhavabhuti. His other important books are all collections of poems: *Kusumanjali*, *Utkala-gatha* (songs and poems on Orissa), *Brahmo-Sangita* and *Basanta-gatha*, the book of sonnets.

CHAPTER XIII

OTHER LIGHTS IN POETRY

THE brilliant trio, Radhanatha, Madhusudana and Fakirmohana, had a host of followers in prose and poetry. Among them the following alone are important, for having made individual contributions of their own, in spite of carrying in their works marks of deep influence of their masters.

Chintamani Mohanty

He is the most prolific author in the whole period—maybe in the entire Oriya literature. There are about one hundred books to his credit and these too on all manner of subjects including even tracts on the cultivation of groundnut and red-pepper. He composed *kavyas* and ballads and short poems in any number and on all imaginable subjects and wrote novels, short stories and travelogues too. Starting life as a primary school teacher, he spent the best part of his life as the court poet of the Raja of Surangi in Ganjam district, making the very best use of his leisured occupation.

The general feeling about him is that his pen lacked that divine spark which is true poetic talent. His poetry was just readable and tolerable verse and is valued today for having taken under its wing men and matters that no other poet ever touched. He has, for instance, written *kavyas* of considerable length on Ghumusar, the taluk where Upendra Bhanja was born and on Surangi, the estate of his patron. There is a good deal of such poetised geography or descriptive writing on particular spots of beauty or historical or political units to his credit, such as Mahendragiri, Simharaj, Udayana Khanda, etc. His long descriptive poem on Mahendragiri, the picturesque mountain, celebrated in the Puranas as the hermitage of Parasurama, bears, however, the imprint of a sincere love of nature and moments of deep feeling. Divided into several cantos and written in blank-verse, it makes, for a nature-poem, excellent reading, as interesting

as a narrative. A teacher by profession, he tried to set up worthy ideals for the younger generation by placing before them poems on the 'Seven Satis', the 'Aryan Heroines', the 'Seven Heroes' and the like. His *Visva-chitra* or 'Pictures of the world' is a collection of story poems aiming at the exposition of the vanities of life.

The most important of his *kavyas*, however, are those on Vikramaditya, India's greatest legendary monarch and on Mukunda Deva, the last Hindu king of Orissa. In these his poetic imagination and expression rise to quite respectable levels. Both works, almost epical in size, are written in vigorous blank-verse. In *Vikramaditya* he indeed rises to Olympic heights, perhaps because of the very nature of the subject, and gives his readers the vision of a noble soul and a noble king engaged in war and adventures. In one of his adventures the poet makes the Indian monarch even sail up the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to give battle to the Romans!

The poet's works are now available collectively in six enormous volumes.

Nandakishor Bala, the Poet of the Orissa Village

Like Radhanatha and Madhusudana, Nandakishor Bala also started life as a teacher and retired as Inspector of Schools. Born in the village Kusupur in the district of Cuttack, he came of a class that is closely attached to the soil and the village. This and his early upbringing in his native village made an indelible impression on the sensitive mind of the poet. For the first time in Oriya literature, a country-bred poet, in spite of his University education and residence in urban areas for the most part of his official career, sang of the village and the village folk, and wrote lyrics, lullabies, odes and ballads. He had a genuine spiritual and mental affinity with, and the true ring of, the folk-songs of Orissa. Like Fakirmohana's adoption of rustic speech in literature, Nandakishor's adoption of the metres, materials and imagery of folk-songs for modern lyrics was a definite innovation and an excellent artistic contribution, bringing the smell of the soil and the village into the sophisticated atmosphere of modern poetry. Nandakishor's *Palli-chitra* (Vignettes of the

village) is a real pageant of Orissan village life, enchantingly and nostalgically worked into a befittingly slow-moving narrative metre and in simple, elegant diction. It is a small volume, but a great poem. The procession of the old *chatsala* (village school) with its cane-wielding Abadhan (schoolmaster), the terror of the village children, the bluffing, talkative village barber, the village minstrel who sings, to the accompaniment of the mono-stringed *kendra*, the ballad of the Yogi-prince Govindachandra, bringing tears to the eyes of soft-hearted housewives, the village haberdasher whose visits are keenly looked forward to by the womenfolk, the village priest who was once completely identified with the village, the village burning ghat, and other familiar scenes such as those of agriculture, pass before our mind's eye with such vividness, creating such situations of humour and pathos, that they make this little poem a treasure in the memory of every cultured Oriya. Nandakishor wrote innumerable other poems and a few *kavyas* also on the lines of Radhanatha. But all of them are considered no more than second-rate imitation. He is gaining the singular estimation that he so richly deserves among all modern Oriya poets for his children's poems and the poetisation of the Orissa village, in the spirit of Orissan folk-lore.

Here is a sample of his village-scape in poetry from *Palli-chitra:*

The Village Barn

At the end of the village are the barns where the harvest is gathered for threshing. The farmer guards the harvest at night, sleeping away from home in a temporary loft in the barn. He freely spins yarns about his experiences in the night, when he meets other folk next morning.

Close to the common barn lies the large village tank with red water-lilies in full bloom. The melodies and colours of the various water-fowl add to its enchantment.

The village folk generally gather here in the mornings for a full dose of gossip. Some smoke, some relate stories and others listen; some sneeze with the snuff they put into their nostrils and some wash their teeth at the water-side.

The barber, busy with his craft, tells stories of all lands;

the old talk of *sastras* and ethics; others talk only of matters domestic, while some come to blows over trivialities.

The harvest lies scattered on the ground in sheaves still half-wet. The poor farmer worries as he looks at them, for they are the meagre source out of which he must support his wife and children, meet the demands of the Mahajan, and pay rent to the Government as well.

Nandakishor wrote also innumerable short poems on all sorts of subjects, some reflective, some satiric, some patriotic, but all with the deep stamp of a lyrical heart and a scholarly and observant mind. His novel *Kanakalata* is also of the same quality as his poetry—radiating the quiet, romantic aroma of the village. The heroine, Kanakalata, blooms before our eyes like a charming water-lily of the cool pellucid waters of a village pond. Over all the works of Nandakishor, prose or poetry, hangs a thin cloud of subtle melancholy—another aspect of Indian village life. Thus this poet, in all that he wrote, was the very embodiment of life in rural Orissa.

Gangadhara Meher—The Classical Star

The popular poet Gangadhara Meher (1862-1924) is in a class by himself. Mehers are the hereditary producers of the famous Sambalpur textiles. He was born in one of such poor Meher families in Barapalli in the district of Sambalpur. Though he had very little formal education, he managed to acquire an excellant knowledge of Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali and some amount of English also, all by his own efforts. For a living, till very late in life, he had to follow the hereditary vocation of weaving cloth and selling it personally in the local 'hat'. But he became famous all over Orissa after the publication of his very first book *Kichaka-vadha* and thereafter his life became a little more comfortable, mainly because the patriotic zamindar of Borasambar, living not far from his village, became his life-long patron.

What distinguishes Meher from all other poets in Orissa is his super-excellent craftsmanship. He turned whatever base metal he touched into the finest gold through his alchemic touch. He was not very original in his plots and patterns

and followed the usual forms of his predecessors; what distinguished this poor self-educated weaver from all of his fellow-writers was the way he excelled them in the singular and unprecedented artistry of his execution. The way he tackled the old mètres and made them serve modern needs, the rhythmic elegance and aptness of his diction, his happy, faultless rhymings, the serene classical dignity that runs through his entire performance and above all, the rare insight he displays into the mind and soul of his characters, make him stand out among the whole galaxy of poets in Orissa. All aspects considered, Gangadhara may be taken as a miniature Kalidasa in Oriya literature. Kalidasa borrowed not only the characters but also similes, metaphors and descriptions from many of his predecessors and yet turned all that borrowed material into pictures of wondrous beauty, a beauty that had not been there before. Exactly the same process is discernible in the working of the poetic genius, ot this simple weaver of Sambalpur. An enormous quantity of poetry has been produced in Oriya on the portrayal of Sita, the ideal woman. But nothing in the whole of Oriya literature can surpass the beauty, charm and grandeur of Sita as she comes to life in Meher's famous *kavya*, *Tapasvini*. This precious gem is set in such exquisite and delicate verbal jewellery as to make it impossible to translate without destroying the original artistry altogether. I have heard Pandit Lochana Prasad Pande of Raigarh (M.P.), the well-known Hindi litterateur, recite rapturously the sweet, sonorous lines from poet Meher, whom he knew personally. He even attempted translating Meher's *Kichaka-vadha* as his brother Mukutadhari Pande had attempted translating Bhaktacharana Dasa's *Mathuramangal*: but each found that the beauty and music of the Oriya original could not be carried into Hindi.

Meher not only wrote *kavyas* on right classical models, but also wrote odes, sonnets and lyrics on modern lines. As a matter of fact his originality finds truer expression in the shorter pieces than in his classical productions, the *kavyas*. In them we find that his vision and imagination touch all aspects of life, like nature, God, nationalism, the people, the wrongs of current society and what not. In spite of his

life-long poverty and hard struggle for existence, he sang:

Ye fellow-travellers, fail not to see
How beautiful this world of ours is!

Do not indeed a mother's affection, a wife's love,
The talk of friends and the counsel of the wise,
Drive away all the rigours of life that exist!
And do not the discoveries of perpetually new events,
Unveiling the mysteries of life,
Bring to light, for our benefit, myriads of fountains
Of delight in this earthly existence?

Ye travellers, look and admire this world of ours
That is so interesting!

This is only the first stanza of a charming lyric which can be set to soul-stirring music. Another lyric which has gained universal celebrity in Orissa is his poem 'Bhakti' or 'Devotion', in which he says:

Is it necessary for Thine worship, my Lord,
To count the beads of a rosary?
Who indeed can tell Thine rosary
Of which the beads are myriads of stars and planets?
And have I the strength even to carry the dust
Off Thine feet to my head?
For, are not millions of solar worlds
Contained in those tiny grains?

What I shall worship Thee with
Is indeed the problem of problems to me,
For what is there in this whole world
Which is not Thine?

The I-ness that I have, is perhaps the only thing that is absolutely mine.
And I venture to surrender that at Thine feet,
Thou Monarch of all the worlds!

Meher, though classical in his mental make-up, was also keenly alive to the problems of current life. In *Bharati-bhavana* (Musings on Mother India) he attacked the British Govern-

ment as bitterly as any political leader of the time. In 'They too pass as Right Honourables' he has caustically satirised the corrupt dignitaries of officialdom. He has written an excellent poem on such a drab subject as 'Panchayat' and in his *Krishak-sangit* or 'Songs for the farmers', one discovers the agricultural and the social reformer in the poet—the messenger of new life in this New Age of science, in a garland of exquisite little ballads on such poetically contemptible subjects as 'Groundnuts' and 'Sugarcane', or 'How to eradicate plant diseases', or 'Cow-keeping', 'Cauliflower', or 'Jerusalem Artichoke', etc., etc.

Because of his lack of good education and his poverty, Meher was prevented from speaking of a wider world. He knew only his district and the people living there and their problems. And he knew the classical Indian literature through books. This limited world was the only source of his material. But the little that he knew he knew most intimately and saw that little world with the third eye of a genuine poet. What Jane Austen has done in English fiction, Meher did in Oriya poetry—making a miniature but highly finished filigree work of the little world in which he lived. He has sung of the natural beauties of Sambalpur, his native district, as was never done before. The small hill of Budharaja that overlooks the city of Sambalpur and the famous river Mahanadi that flows past it, the Hirakud Island now celebrated for the enormous hydro-electric project established by the Government of India—all these, besides other notable places of interest in Orissa, have been immortalised in the lines of this weaver. Like a true poet, he has charmed us with the exquisite music of his lines as well as with the high idealism that saturates all his works. No subject was contemptible to his pen, if it was likely to do a little good for the common man. In spite of his poor circumstances he protested against and satirised contemporary wrongs and tyrannies of the officials and of the foreign government with a fearlessness that is found only in men of real genius. In many a poem he also daringly exposes the shortcomings of the Oriyas, his fallen compatriots, and exhorts them to rise and march ahead following the footsteps of the more progressive nations. Thus by any criterion this poor, self-educated and simple

weaver of Sambalpur comes out triumphant as a great poet endowed with poetic talent not very common in any country.

In private life the poet was genuinely humble, ever anxious to do a good turn to others, feared by the corrupt and loved and respected by all. He never appealed to any Raja or rich man to get any of his books published. Manuscripts of his works lay with him for years together on that account and were rescued only by his friends and admirers from the ravages of white-ants in his dingy ancestral cottage. He refused point blank a request from the Raja of Bamra State to be his court poet.

All told, Gangadhara Meher is one of the rarest personalities and poets in the whole range of Oriya literature.

The list of his works is : *Tapasvini*, *Pranaya-vallari*, *Kichaka-vadha*, *Indumati*, *Utkala-Lakshmi*, *Ayodhya-drishya*, *Kavita-kallola*, *Arghya-thali*, *Ahalya-stava*, *Mahima*, *Bharati-bhavana*, *Padmini*, *Krishaka-sangita*—all of them either anthologies or *kavyas*. His prose writings consist of his incomplete autobiography, essays on Nriparaja Simha, Purna Kavi Fakirmohana and the late Kashinatha Panda. The first grade Government College at Sambalpur has been named after this brilliant poor local weaver and arrangements are afoot for celebrating his first birth centenary in a grand manner all over the Oriya speaking land.

Padmacharana Patnaik

Even though nothing original or significant was contributed by him, Padmacharana's lyrics and poems are popular with all classes of readers for just a likeable poetic flavour in them all. There is discernible in each poem of his the living pulsation of the soul sensitive to external beauties, to the history of his people, and to the small, romantic exchanges of human hearts, one to the other, in day-to-day life. His ode on the Dhauli Pahad (which carries the Kalinga edict of Asoka) is a favourite recitation in Orissa schools. His poems are now available in two collections—*Padmapakhuda* (Lotus-petals) and *Surya-mukhi* (Sun-flowers).

Kuntala Kumari Shabat

The most sensational of the women poets of Orissa, the

late Kuntala Kumari has become a legend which is a little out of proportion to her genuine worth as a poet or author. Born to Christian parents, she spent her entire childhood in Burma where her father served as a medical officer. Exiled by circumstances to distant lands, this precocious girl developed a fanatic enthusiasm for all that was Orissan, Indian and Hindu. Trained for the medical profession at Cuttack, she amazed all her boy rivals and teachers by standing first in every examination. She adopted Hinduism and had a sensational Arya-Samajist marriage at Delhi where she settled down to practice and where she died at the height of her professional as well as her literary prosperity.

She has to her credit five novels and five books of poems. The novels are already dated and so are also most of the poems, which were mostly either patriotic or devotional. The latter class reaches culmination in *Prema-chintamani* a lyrical drama on the divine romance of Radha and Krishna, written in a modernised pattern. But it is difficult for any modern poet to surpass the lyrical heights in the similar class of poetry left by the Vaishnava poets, such as Gopalakrishna, Dinakrishna and Abhimanyu and so the lady poet need not be much blamed for her failure. But in most of her poems in general, the enthusiasm of an eager spirit, of a restless soul, out to express itself in as many ways as possible and the sensitiveness of a fine mind to all that was good and beautiful and noble in this world, are clearly visible to any reader, in spite of artistic shortcomings which the poet could easily have avoided if any of her friends and admirers had guided her to real excellence in literary craftsmanship. She had absolutely no training at all for it either at school or at home.

The little piece below from her *Archana* (Worship) is quite typical of her poetic productions:

Who says this world is merely illusion
And only the snare of Maya?
To my eyes this world is beautiful,
A paradise of endless love;
I am born to work here,
This world is my laboratory of good deeds;
Death will not be the end of my life
But the start of a new one.

This is neither end, nor misery;
Nor is it alien to me; in my own native land,
I shall climb up and up through action,
A dream, that will never be mere dream to me.

Lakshmikanta Mahapatra

Scion of an aristocratic family in the district of Balasore, in youth handsome as a Greek god, Lakshmikanta's life is a heroic and heartening story of ceaseless struggle against an unkind fate. For, stricken with a fell disease, this bonny prince of a young man remained invalid for the best part of his life, his fingers losing the power even to ply the pen. Imagine the frustration of such a man. But the heroic soul of Lakshmikanta never yielded to dispair and he never gave the family or his friends a chance to pity him. In early youth he was rich as well as handsome; he was coveted in society for his musical talents, a dancer and actor and a fine composer. His marriage was romantic. Even as he was dying day by day of a hateful disease, he yet smiled on, laughed and made others laugh, sang and made the whole nation sing his songs. A finer soul it is not easy to meet anywhere.

Lakshmikanta never attempted anything ambitious—it was not physically possible for him to do so. He was, in body and mind, essentially lyrical, the ready charmer of the moment. And so his work consists of only scattered songs and satires, both in prose and verse, and excellent parodies. The satires, though entertaining in their times, particularly those aimed at the hypocrisies of the Congressites, are losing topical significance. Some of his devotional and patriotic poems have, however, come to stay. At any cultural or political gathering in Orissa which is peculiarly local, Lakshmikanta's 'Vande Utkala Janani' (I bow to you, Mother Utkal) is sure to be the auspicious inaugural song. That is a glory indeed for any poet.

CHAPTER XIV

LIGHTS IN PROSE

FAKIRMOHANA, Radhanatha and Madhusudana all wrote poetry as well as prose. While Madhusudana's prose was classical, Radhanatha's individualistic and artistic, that of Fakirmohana touched all standards from rustic speech to the grand manner of the erudite. But they were not all. Many others in their times and later have made significant contributions to the development of prose in Oriya which at present may not be very rich or comprehensive, but is nevertheless a granary of precious grain. To the *Chronicles* of the Jagannatha Temple, the ornate prose of *Rudrasudhanidhi*, the *Journals* of the Choinis, the metaphysical expositions of the Panchasakha period and the Fast stories, were added, in the eighteenth century, the finished story-cycle of Brajanatha Badajena. To these were now added the voluminous prose productions of the 19th and 20th centuries, through text-books, essays, stories, periodicals, novels and the daily papers, all written under the impact of western influences. Now the tables are practically turned: We are now in the age of Prose. Poetry had dominated for over a thousand years, but was now gradually pushed below the surface consciousness of the nation, though without doubt, poetry's place, deep in the soul of the nation, remains as undisputed as ever.

Prose writers in Oriya during the modern period, besides the celebrated Trio, make a long list. But mention is made here only of those who have made some definitely new contribution in style or matter. These are as follows:

Ramasankara Ray, the Pioneer

This pioneer playwright of Orissa, of whom the reader will hear more in the chapter on Orissa's plays and theatre, was a pioneer in fiction too, having left behind a very significant novel which was written about a dozen years before Senapati tried his first. Ray tried three novels, but could

complete only one, *Bivasini*, which is quite a remarkable book not only for his times but for our times also. Overshadowed by Senapati as a novelist, the importance and significance of this novel of Ray's has not been recognised as it deserves by literary critics in Orissa. But objectively considered it is much better planned than any novel of Senapati's and has some unusual characters and situations, quite modern in their essence.

It is the story of a famine in Orissa during the Maratha rule. The 'Bull of Paradip'[1], as the Raja of Paradvipa was called, had an organised band of robbers, as one of the means to acquire wealth and power. This robber band controlled the entire Orissan Delta from Cuttack to the mouth of the Mahanadi, where that feudal chief's palace-fort stood. Under the direction of the Raja the leader of the bandits, an educated and clever widower official of his, robbed the rich and helped the poor with doles and free food, with the blessings of a holy man who lived in an obscure islet in the Mahanadi. One night the band looted, in the same village, the house of a rich miser and that of a rich Oriya official under the Marathas, a man who was deliberately keeping the Maratha Subadar in the dark about the famine in the land. Among the booty were a handsome widow, the daughter-in-law of the miser, and also the daughter of the official, who were neighbours. A romance developed between the widower-leader of the robber-band and the young widow who, however, sublimated it, turning it into pure brother and sister relationship and sacrificing herself for the happiness of her friend, Rasakala, the traitor official's beauteous daughter. The hero and the heroine were united under the auspices of the Raja and Rani of Paradvipa in the holy man's hermitage, to the hurrahs of a large crowd.

Among the other characters of the novel a few stand out as quite original for that time. One is Dasa Khadanga, the leader of the famine-stricken masses of Orissa, who dared to face the Maratha Subadar in his own palace at Cuttack and challenge him as to his responsibilities in the situation. The emaciated, starving hero died a martyr in the cause of

[1] Paradvipa, of which the old maritime glory is about to have a revival as a modern port on the east coast of Orissa.

his people, the first leader of the proletariat to appear in Oriya literature, perhaps in any Indian literature.

The other significant character is the Maratha officer Duman Sardar. Full of human kindness and sick to his soul with the atrocities the Marathas were committing on the innocent masses of Orissa, he was, under the guise of doing his official duties, secretly helping the Oriyas. This kind-hearted bureaucrat of those times reminds us of many a good friend of India among the Britishers in our own. He stands as the only lamp of humanity in Oriya literature during the whole dark chapter of the Maratha rule in Orissa.

This remarkable story has, however, lost the desired effect on its readers because of the archaic, over-Sanskritised style the author used and for its big, unnecessary patches of reflections and sermons to the readers. Ramasankara's great defect in his plays also was this archaism, a defect which he could easily have avoided. This is clear from many examples of conversational simplicity in his writings.

Gopinatha Nanda Sarma : Philologist, Lexicographer and Critic

Next to Fakirmohana the man who was to receive the nation's unstinted respect for unalloyed devotion to literature in the modern period is Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma of Paralakemidi. Though only a poorly paid Sanskrit pandit in the local Maharaja's High School, his scholarly contributions have been amazing both in quality and quantity. Completely ignorant of English or any other modern European language, the erudite Pandit had an intuitive analytical power worthy of any western scholar. Trained formally in Sanskrit only, this great scholar took up for critical study, the *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa, which had long been the contempt of Brahmins in Orissa and produced a book of textual analysis and literary assessment of unquestioned logic and authority on the great epic poet. His liberal, unorthodox attitude cannot be too much praised when we find that this great Sanskritist was the first in Orissa to point out the genuine beauty in the supposed barbarism of Sarala Dasa in language and content. He recognised them as expressive of the true idiom of the Oriya language and of the realities of Orissa society. He compares Sarala's *Mahabharata*,

book by book and episode by episode, with the original in Sanskrit and with the Telugu and Bengali parallels, and discusses all aspects of the epic—social, textual, literary and religious—in as thorough a manner as was possible nearly half a century ago. Even today this study has not been surpassed.

A similar book of his on Jagannatha Dasa's *Bhagavata* has very unfortunately not been published in book form so far.

Pandit Gopinatha's 'Oriya Philology' (*Odia Bhashatatva*) is another monumental work. Competent non-Oriya linguistic scholars have expressed amazement at what this Pandit, ignorant of English, accomplished in this difficult field nearly fifty years ago. This may, indeed, be one of the very few books of this class in all the Indian languages. It is a big volume of about one thousand pages, covering all aspects of the morphology of the Oriya language.

The Pandit was also the pioneer in compiling the first genuine etymological Oriya Dictionary. Before him dictionaries in the language were merely voluminous lists of Sanskrit words, the majority of which were never used by the common man. Nanda Sarma was the first to ransack Oriya literature and also Oriya as spoken in the different districts of Orissa to collect genuine, native Oriya words and cite apt quotations from standard works in support of the meanings he gave to them. This *Sabda-Tatvabodha Abhidhana* (Etymological Dictionary) is therefore another monumental work that this great scholar has left behind.

In the brief gaps between these highly painstaking undertakings, the Pandit relaxed by making translations of Sanskrit *kavyas* and *natakas*. In these too he has left the stamp of his individuality. To the amazement of all readers the Pandit in these translations composed Oriya verses in the pure Sanskrit metres of the originals. In this too he was a pioneer, along with Raghunatha Parichha, a co-citizen of his. Acquaintance with Sanskrit metres and experiments made with them in modern times by other poets in Oriya, are really due to the successful pioneering of this great Pandit.

Caring little for rewards or literary honours, Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma was busy over one monumental work after another all through his life. Only late in life unstinted praise

and homage poured in on him from all the intellectuals in the land, for his scholarship and his devotion to and dissemination of knowledge. He died a poor but an honoured man.

Shyama Sundara Rajaguru, the Essayist

A contemporary of Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma who also belonged like him to Paralakemidi, Shyama Sundara Rajaguru was the pioneer in Orissa in the study of Oriya poetic metres. He also made the first critical estimates of the works of individual ancient poets with reference to events of their lives. Rajaguru's premature death was a great loss to modern Oriya literature. His *Prabandhavali* containing all his literary essays is now mostly out of date, but its chronological value is recognised by all modern scholars in the field.

Pandit Mrityunjaya Ratha

Standing first in the Bihar and Orissa Sanskrit title examination, and winning a gold medal, Pandit Mrityunjaya Ratha showed, unlike Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma, very little trace of Sanskrit scholarship in his writings. He wrote, for a Sanskrit scholar, in a remarkably simple style, clear, precise and easy-flowing. He has translated the *Kumarasambhava* of Kalidasa, and many of the celebrated Sanskrit plays into Oriya, but his most significant contributions are the critical biographical essays he wrote on several ancient and medieval Oriya poets, including Sarala Dasa. Unfortunately these essays still lie scattered in the pages of old periodicals. His book *Nari-darpana*, a collection of sketches on some noble women of India and Orissa, remains, for its delectable style, a unique book of its kind in Oriya so far.

The Pandit was a Sanskrit teacher in Government schools, and to the great loss of Oriya literature died prematurely, just when his creative powers were at the highest.

Gopala Chandra Praharaja, the Satirist

A lawyer by profession and a zamindar by inheritance, Gopalachandra Praharaja is accepted as the greatest prose satirist of modern Orissa. Inspired mostly by his friend

Visvanatha Kara, the famous editor of 'Utkala Sahitya', Praharaja wrote satirical comments on contemporary happenings and situations month after month for many years continuously in the columns of his friend's journal. Only a few of these periodical writings have been published in book form, such as *Bhagavata Tungire Sandhya* (Evenings in the Bhagavata-hall), *Nananka bastani* (My father's files) and *Bai Mohanti Panji* (Mr. Bai Mohanti's papers).

As the subjects were mostly topical, these satires have by now lost their edge for modern readers, but some at least will retain their charm forever because of their pregnant humour. The character of Mr. Bai Mohanti, an imaginary old-world personality, sceptical of modern ways and making caustic comments on new-fangled manners when the occasion arises, is deathless already. He is the Sir Roger de Coverley of Oriya literature.

Praharaja had an amazingly fluent and facile style and is supposed to be the literary heir of Fakirmohana so far as his prose style is concerned. He wrote in the colloquial speech peculiar to the district of Cuttack, with a good sprinkling of the court jargon with which, being a lawyer, he was quite familiar. Enlivened with specious argument, facile wit and broad humour, Praharaja's prose is highly entertaining.

Towards the latter part of his life, Praharaja busied himself with the compilation of a quadrilingual dictionary, the largest in Oriya so far, consisting of seven ponderous volumes.

Praharaja's collections of the folk-tales of Orissa, as well as of its proverbs and folk-sayings are also a most valuable contribution to the literature. He was the pioneer in this field and as yet his collections remain the best.

THE TWO GREAT EDITORS

Men of genius all over the world require publicity officers for their messages and achievements. It would seem as though they bring them along with themselves for the fulfilment of their mission. The modern age in Oriya literature owes a great deal to two such Editors for the zeal with which they championed new writers and their writings and tried

to take them to the doors of common readers. One of the two is:

Visvanatha Kara

As the Editor of the 'Utkala Sahitya' he was practically the philosopher, guide and friend of three generations of writers in Orissa. Coming under the spell of Madhusudana Rao in early youth, this blue-blooded Brahmin renounced the orthodox Hindu faith and became a Brahmo, braving poverty and social ostracism for his freedom of conscience. This intellectual integrity he maintained all through his life, sparing none however highly placed or however intimate. The scathing attacks in his editorial columns were read and enjoyed with respect all over Orissa. His prose style was logical, clear, absolutely free from redundancy or any effort at mere embellishment, and had a uniform elegance all its own. His *Vividha-prabandha* (Miscellaneous essays) remains now the only book to his credit, but it contains some of the most thought-provoking essays ever written in Oriya. His essay on Upendra Bhanja has practically put an end to all controversy about that poet and his objective evaluation runs the risk of a challenge only from dogmatics and fanatics. A friend of Radhanatha, Fakirmohana and Madhusudana, he was their publisher as well as critic; critic and friend too to all eminent Oriya writers down to the thirties of this century. During all these years, about half a century, Visvanatha Kara was to all intents and purposes the very heart of literary life in Orissa and so great was the respect for his standard of values that the publication of a poem or a story by a young writer in his 'Utkala Sahitya' was taken as a triumph, a certificate of success, an honour much coveted but obtained only by the gifted.

Visvanatha Kara was also a very remarkable orator. He was the pioneer of women's emancipation in Orissa. His daughters were among the first women graduates of Orissa, and two of them, Srimati Pratibha Kara and Srimati Suprabha Kara have also made names as writers.

Pandit Nilamani Vidyaratna

The other famous Editor, Pandit Nilamani Vidyaratna,

was a primary school teacher. To him goes the sole credit for the pioneering of the movement for the unification of scattered Oriya tracts under one homogeneous government in the present State of Orissa. As Editor of the 'Sambalpur Hitaishini' under the auspices of the Durbar of Bamra, he generated and kept alive Oriya patriotism and encouraged the cultivation of Oriya literature in all the mutually exclusive twenty-four ex-native states of Orissa. It was as editor of 'Sambalpur Hitaishini' that he discovered the poetic genius of Gangadhara Meher in the little known village of Barapalli and got him started on his career by arranging the publication of his early books. The poet has left behind an immortal poem as a tribute to this noble Editor-scholar.

As Editor of 'Praja Bandhu' in the district of Ganjam then in Madras Presidency, Vidyaratna first organised a conference of the Oriyas in Madras in 1902, demanding unification of all Oriya tracts. This gave birth to the larger Utkala Sammilani or the All-Orissa Political Conference, which in its first session in 1903 brought to its platform Oriyas from all ranks and parts of the country demanding a homogeneous Oriya state. This materialised only in 1936.

Late in life, settled at Cuttack, Nilamani used to edit 'Utkala Madhupa', a unique magazine of miscellaneous knowledge.

He died a poor man, and has not yet received the honour that he well deserves from the Oriyas for whom he dedicated his life.

TWO CELEBRATED FREE-THINKERS

Among the prose writers in Orissa of the last three quarters of a century, two only stand out as the most outspoken free-thinkers. They are Jalandhara-Deva of Bamra and Mohinimohana Senapati, the only son of Fakirmohana Senapati, the novelist.

Born in the jungle-state of Bamra in the forties of the last century, Jalandhara Deva, a scion of the local Raj family noted for culture and scholarship, developed a surprisingly modern scientific attitude to life. In his criticisms of the

Sanskrit *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, he shattered the popular idols and ideas, making the demigods in the epics appear no better, on occasion, than erring fools like ourselves. He was a Westerner out and out and refused to compromise with irrationalities anywhere. The way Krishna and other *Mahabharata* heroes kidnapped and married girls does not show, according to him, that those epic times were very civilised. He also ruthlessly exposed the interested Brahmanic propaganda in all ancient Hindu literature.

Mohinimohana Senapati, the only son of the famous novelist, was a professor of philosophy and was, even to the last, a confirmed atheist. He caused his great father no end of mental suffering by his heresies and unorthodox behaviour. With relentless logic, he shattered the spiritual claims of Brahmoism, the faith of his father's close friend Madhusudana Rao, who was his own guardian during his student days. He openly advocated polyandry and polygamy and even the abolition of marriage as an institution. Worse, he quietly committed vandalism on the writings of his great father by freely deleting portions which did not agree with his own ideas. Because of all these, Mohinimohana was not much respected in society, but was looked upon as queer-headed. He had no style of his own, but he wrote with clarity of thought and expression.

Sasibhushana Ray, the Prose Poet

Son of Radhanatha Ray, the poet, Sasibhushana may be described as the most befitting heir both spiritually as well as materially, of his great father. His works in prose are an excellent complement to what his father left behind in wonderful poetry. In company with his father, and also alone, Sasibhushana travelled very extensively over Orissa and observed men and nature most minutely. He knew the hills, forests, rivers and important villages of Orissa with a thoroughness and familiarity that no other man knew or now knows. Like his father he loved nature with a deep spiritual passion and spent most of his time in a quiet, sylvan retreat that he had built for himself in the famous island of Dhavalesvara in the river Mahanadi, four miles from Cuttack.

His *Utkal-prakriti* (Nature in Orissa), a book of prose-poems on the various beauty-spots in the State, is dedicated not to any person, but to Orissa's great river Mahanadi, with a dedicatory note vibrating with lyrical emotion. His *Utkalar Rituchitra* (Pageant of seasons in Orissa) is another fine record. He wrote incessantly over a long period and died recently. His essays on Orissa's Nature alone will make him immortal in Oriya literature. Here is a short extract from *Utkala-prakriti*, from the essay 'Evening at Uttaresvara'.

The setting sun has already tinged the white banner and the trident on the main temple of Lingaraja. Over there, the temple of Alabukesvara looks lonely in the Kochila forest. At a little distance stands the temple of Ramesvara, surrounded by the ruins of other temples, with a melancholy air. Beyond the paddy fields, one's eyes greet the temples of Brahmesvara, Bhaskaresvara, Meghesvara, and Raja Rani. The tops of the temples of Parasuramesvara, Sidhesvara, Muktesvara, and Kedaresvara are visible also from among the mango groves. . . . The island fane in the lake of Bindusagara looks picturesque as birds congregate over its roof for the night's rest. On the steps of that lake, ladies from Bengal, Maharashtra, Orissa and Andhra-desa demonstrate the aesthetic sensibilities of their various regions. The great lake Bindusagara looks gay with the reflections of these beautiful women on its steps and with the colour of the setting sun, yet has the melancholy of glories long past. . . . The expansive rocky upland round about the temple of Alabukesvara is now painted a golden-yellow with the rays of the setting sun. Over there, from the wide belt of paddy-fields near the river Gangua up to the Dhauli Hill, bullock carts are carrying sheaves of newly cut paddy and hay, wending homeward. The Sun-god is retiring like us men, behind the Bisram-ghat (Rest ghat) of the Bindusagara. Suddenly somebody sings out in the nearby woodland:

'I saw today, Oh darling,
The vision that is blue
Like a rain cloud.'

CHAPTER XV

PLAYS AND THEATRES IN ORISSA

In Orissa as in all other civilised languages and peoples, the play and the theatre originated and have been intimately associated with religion. And both have issued from the two social opposite poles of the masses and the aristocracy. The two categories of drama, entertainment for the masses and for the classes, have continued to exist side by side, and have influenced each other for centuries in their effort to adjust to changing tastes. Let us consider the 'class' or classical variety first which is supposed to be artistically higher, representing true literature and the intellectual character of a people. Comparing both varieties, any unbiased critic must feel that the differences are in modes of expression, of degree rather than of kind, that by absolute standards of art and entertainment some of the mass dramas are as good as, if not better than, their opposite numbers in the classical variety. But prejudices die hard and, while we find third-rate formal plays being honoured as text-books for post-graduate studies, the finest of the mass plays are not even taken into the gracious consideration of the critics and the litterateurs.

Orissa has all along been a hospitable land of arts, such as architecture, sculpture, dance, music and drama, with a surprising individuality in each. About her characteristic Odissi dances, now practised by famous artistes like Indrani Rahaman and others, this is what the distinguished art-critic of *The Statesman* once said: "It is obvious, now that we have seen Odissi dances five times, that this is a distinct school of Bharata Natya, or more correctly, a survival of some proto-Bharata Natya, some ancient Indian dance from which sprang, not only Bharata Natya but all sorts of varieties—Kathakali, Kuchipudi, a number of Attamas, some ancestor of present-day Kathak, and presumably the dances of greater India: Siam, Java and Bali. As it is, Odissi is a lovely dance, with a large vocabulary of finger and hand

gestures, not as punditic as Bharata Natya, but rather like the pure dance (Nritya) form of it."[1]

Dance was as inseparable and integral a part of the Oriya drama as it was of Oriya social life itself. It is unfortunate that this cultural colour is slowly vanishing from the national life in Orissa owing to general poverty, and more particularly to the disappearance of the feudal chiefs and landed aristocracy in general. Orissa's famous temples were also a magnificent gift of these aristocrats to the nation. And each such temple may be taken as a permanent theatre in stone. The design of the world-famous shrine of Konaraka, for example, as a chariot of the Sun-god, colossal in size and as delicate in artistic creativeness as exquisite jewellery, is nothing less than a gigantic theatre, with life-size *Apsaras* supposed to be dancing, singing, and playing on musical instruments all along the aerial journey of the Sun-god, the whole chariot being sculptured all over, like a replica of the Universe, representing the animal, the vegetable, the human and the supra-human creatures in all their bewildering varieties. If a play is a mirror held up to nature, Konaraka is indeed a colossal play conceived and executed by superhuman playwrights in stone, for all the world to view at any hour and in any season. And what is true of Konaraka is more or less true also of other famous shrines in Orissa, like the Raja-Rani, the Lingaraja, the Brahmesvara, the Parsuramesvara, Muktesvara and similar other shrines, celebrated not so much for their deities as for the grand life-dramas they display. In other words, before we discuss the plays in the Oriya language, it would not be out of place to recall that the people speaking that language have wrought and left behind magnificent permanent plays in stone in a series of temples. As a matter of fact the literary plays in Orissa had also their earliest cradles in these artistic treasure-houses. It is inferred from literary and historical documents that the first regular and formal plays in Orissa were enacted either in the precincts of the temples at Puri and Bhubanesvara or in the neighbouring *maths* and monasteries or in the carved theatres on Khandagiri Hills where celebrated religious

[1] *The Statesman*—Republic Supplement, 26.1.56.

heads or pious Jain, Buddhist or Hindu monarchs staged episodes from the Puranas and the Epics as part of their pietistic culture.

THE SANSKRIT DRAMA

There was a long tradition of Sanskrit drama in Orissa on which the local Oriya drama gradually grew during the 19th century. Down to the early years of the 20th century no playwright could free himself from these traditions. In all Oriya plays of those days the Prologue with the Nata, the Nati and the Sutradhara was inevitable. And as a matter of fact the early plays include a large number of translations of the Sanskrit plays into Oriya. Pandits Mrityunjaya Ratha, Gopinatha Nanda Sarma, Harihar Misra and others have left behind Oriya translations of almost all important Sanskrit dramas. But Orissa has the credit of creating and enacting some celebrated original Sanskrit plays also on her own soil which may be taken as her small contribution to the grand sum total of Sanskrit dramatic literature. And the tradition of these theatres and plays goes back as early as the 12th century, as is revealed by records in the temple of Jagannatha. From these records at Puri it is now known that the Sanskrit play *Piyushalahari* by one Jayadeva was enacted in the courtyard of the Jagannatha shrine. The play *Lalita-Madhava* by Rupa Goswami was staged in the Radhakanta *math* famous as Chaitanya's home at Puri. This appears to be a command-performance as it is on record that all the expenses were met from the State treasury. The ruins of the stage where this play was staged still exist. Another play is *Jagannatha Vallabha nataka* by Ray Ramananda, who resigned his viceroyalty of the southern provinces under Orissa monarchs after meeting Chaitanya at Bezwada and busied himself with arranging plays and dances on episodes in the romance of Radha and Krishna to please his spiritual master. It was enacted once in the courtyard of the temple of Jagannatha and again three years later in the monastery of Jagannatha Vallabha, a favourite resort of Chaitanya's. It is on record that in the latter performance the author himself played the hero

and a devadasi Mukta (Pearl) took the part of the heroine.

It has been mentioned that King Kapilendra Deva of the Solar Dynasty of Orissa was a great conqueror and ruler. His reign in the 15th century may be called the Golden Age in Orissa history. There is a Sanskrit play named *Parasurama vijaya* to the credit of this triumphant monarch. In all probability this semi-religious play carries in thin disguise Kapilendra Deva's own panegyrics as a great conqueror. It was acted in the courtyard of the king's palace or that of the temple of Jagannatha. What makes it interesting and valuable in the history of Oriya drama is that in this play, in lieu of songs in Prakrit as ordained in Sanskrit poetics and as practised by all Sanskrit playwrights from Bhasa downwards, we find songs in genuine Oriya. This was certainly a daring experiment for that age and earns the play, which has not much literary merit in itself, the credit of making a beginning with the formal literary play in Oriya.

Then out of the confused darkness of Orissa history under the Moslems and the Marathas, a nightmarish story of invasions and counter-invasions, lootings, arsons and extortions, the factual evidence of a few more plays suggests that in spite of the highly unsettled conditions in which they appeared and the holocausts they managed to survive, play-writing and play-acting was a lively tradition in Orissa long before British rule and English education. In the middle of the 18th century, some unknown author wrote a play called *Gauri Harana* which was staged at Puri with Hindi songs inserted in it for the convenience of the Maratha ruling class of the time. This gives excellent topical value to the play. Then one Khadgaprasada of Dhenkanal, once a vigorous centre of Oriya literary culture under the patronage of the local feudal chiefs, seems to have produced a play called *Padmavati Harana* in 1834. Then in 1868 Raghunatha Parichcha produced *Gopinatha Vallabha nataka*, the peculiarity of which play is that, though its language is Oriya, all the verses in it are written in faultless Sanskrit metres. This style has been practised by many in Orissa, the most prominent of whom is the late Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma of Paralakhemidi, as has already been mentioned in the previous chapter.

This closes the chapter on Oriya plays of pre-modern times. The story of real modern plays begins in 1877, more than seventy years after the British conquered Orissa.

The Modern Stage and Play: Ramasankara Ray

The British came to conquer and rule Orissa in 1803, nearly half a century after British administration was established in the neighbouring province of Bengal. To start with, the newly conquered Orissa was tacked to the tail-end of Bengal. To help the British in its administration, streams of Bengali officers flowed into Orissa. By that time, in imitation of the English plays and theatrical performances given by the British residents of Calcutta, the Bengali stage and drama had already come to vigorous life, and in their turn the Bengali officers in Orissa started arranging performances of Bengali plays on social occasions like Dasara at Cuttack. For many years the literary drama and the formal stage in Orissa in noted towns like Puri and Cuttack were really Bengali, as the so-called educated upper class in Orissa till the other day was also Bengali through and through.

Ramasankara Ray, father of the modern Oriya drama, in his introduction to the first drama which he wrote in 1880, writes that, sick with the performance of Bengali plays in Orissa, his mind revolted and he wanted to produce plays in Oriya depicting the glories of the historic Oriya people. At that time Ramasankara was a young man of 20 or so and had just passed his First Arts Examination. But three years previously the first modern Oriya drama *Babaji nataka* by Jagamohana Lala had already been published. It was a four-act play and had anticipated Gandhi and our Constitution in making out a case for prohibition. Unfortunately in it, ethics overpowered dramatic art, and thus this first play in Oriya was a stage failure. And so, in spite of having a pathfinder ahead of him, Ramasankara Ray, with his first play published in 1880 that became an instantaneous success from all aspects of the theatrical art, is taken as the father of modern Oriya drama—because from the very start he wrote plays in Oriya with the same commendable object as the Elizabethan playwrights wrote plays in English, viz. to make his language as great as Bengali and other Indian

languages; and secondly because the plays themselves were excellent specimens of dramatic art as far as contemporary tastes and standards went.

His first play dealt with the most romantic episode in Orissa's history, the story of King Purushottama Deva who conquered the southern kingdom of Kanchi or Kanjivaram and brought away pretty Padmavati, the Kanchi princess, in order to get her married to an untouchable in revenge for the insult her father had meted to him, but ultimately married her himself through the clever stratagem of his chief minister.

This story, as already described, has been the theme of many a poem, ballad and play in Orissa. And just about the time we are discussing, a Bengali litterateur, Rangalal Banerjee, published a *kavya* in Bengali named *Kanchi-Kaveri* based on the same royal romance. Young Ramasankara took up the same theme of perennial interest to the Oriyas and produced a play of the same title.

This play *Kanchi-Kaveri* had great influence on dramatic production in Orissa for nearly three decades. Although Ramasankara wrote nearly thirty plays of diverse types, this first play of his is accepted as his masterpiece and still enjoys a reputation as a high class literary product. For many succeeding playwrights it became the norm of dramatic production.

Ramasankara is not only the father of modern Oriya plays but also of the modern Orissan stage. Paradoxically enough the young playwright, failing to get either patronage or appreciation in high quarters at Cuttack, discovered an enthusiastic and discerning drama lover in a Mahant of a distant rural *math* in the district of Cuttack. To this little-known but highly patriotic Mahant of Kothpada, whose resources were by no means plentiful at that time, Oriya literature and the Orissan stage owe eternal gratitude. For 40 successive years, this Mahant maintained a permanent theatre at his rural *math* and kept on producing new Oriya dramas year after year on festive occasions, spending considerable amounts of money. Without this Mahant's enthusiastic patronage, the infant Oriya drama might have died a natural death.

But, in the meantime, the performance of Oriya plays had gradually spread to all the important towns and villages of Orissa. It became a part of the social prestige of the Rajas, Maharajas, and the aristocrats in town and country, to invite theatrical parties for shows on occasions like marriages and other social functions. The late Madhusudhana Dasa, Orissa's great political leader, was one of the most important of such patrons. Inside his famous garden-house at Cuttack (now converted into a womens' college) he set up a permanent stage where for many years good shows were given by amateur parties of the city. Similar permanent or semi-permanent theatres grew up almost simultaneously at Paralakhemidi, Baripada, Nilgiri, Chikiti and a host of other places under the patronage of Rajas, zamindars and rich Oriyas.

By the beginning of this century the new Oriya drama had come to stay. Many professional theatrical parties had been started. Although they were all short-lived, their mushroom rise indicates the growing enthusiasm of the people for the new type of intellectual entertainment. Even the principles of dramaturgy were now discussed and debated in the contemporary press. The place and need of song and music in drama were discussed at length in the 'Utkala Sahitya', then the leading Oriya monthly magazine. Bikrama Deva, Yuvaraja of Khariar, himself a playwright, published his *Nataka rachana pranali* (The process of play-writing), drawing the attention of the dramatists to the 'unities' of Greek plays so as to bring drama closer to life. But not to speak of others, these counsels were not observed by the Yuvaraja himself in his dramas.

A large number of plays famous in those early times are now completely lost. But amongst them, those of Ramasankara Ray still remain outstanding for their distinct literary qualities as well as for their chronological importance. For a pioneer, considering the unpropitious conditions in which he worked, his continuous experiments appear quite surprising. He has not left any type of drama untouched—historical, mythological, social, comic, satiric and romantic plays were woven out of his own plots. He gave songs an appropriate position in drama and used blank-verse

and prose with effect for the first time. Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma of Paralakhemidi, Pandit Mrityunjaya Ratha of Cuttack, Pandit Haribara Misra of Puri and Raja Radha-mohana Rajendradeva of Chikiti in Ganjam district, on the other hand, carried on the classical Sanskrit tradition.

Raja of Chikiti

A celebrated literary and social aristocrat, this Raja of Chikiti wrote plays with his idiocyncrasies deeply impressed upon them. The title of all his plays began with the letter 'P' such as *Panchali pattapagarana*, *Parimala sahagamana*, *Prakriti rahasya*, *Prakrita pranaya*, *Pratapa*, etc. He wrote the plays in stiff, ornamental prose with songs in unfamiliar Karnatic modes. All the plays of the Raja have become obsolete, but to the historian of Oriya drama they are a mile-stone that he cannot afford to miss because of their undoubted individuality.

The Stage as Platform and Pulpit

Besides retaining the old traditions, Oriya drama was now widely used as the pulpit also for social reforms such as widow-remarriage, love-marriage, abandonment of caste-pride, abolition of dowry, etc. It has already been said that the very first play in modern Oriya was about the drink evil. The most important of these reformist dramatists was the late Bhikari Charana Patnaik, well known in Orissa also as a satirist and as the protagonist of cottage industry. In his plays he has satirised mostly the snobbery of the early generation of English-educated Indians, castism, ultra-modern ladies and those Indians who preferred to be called Sahibs rather than Indians. He wrote also two noted historical plays, but his main contribution to Oriya drama remains in his satirical ones.

Besides the reformists, there were also the revivalists who tried to re-establish in the minds of the people the individual ideal and a social order based on Bhakti, by means of numberless dramas made up of episodes from the Puranas, such as the stories of Dhruva, Prahlada, Sudama, etc. This class is entirely out of the picture now, as few have faith in those make-believe stories.

Patriotic Plays

The most dominant type for nearly fifty years, covering the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the present century, was the play trying to instill a patriotic spirit in readers and audiences. The objective was patriotism, of both local and the all-India variety. All through the British period, the Oriyas lived a dismembered existence, suppressed and exploited in each of the four different provinces in which they were scattered. Patriotism in Orissa in the last 50 years was, naturally enough, more of the parochial and less of the Indian pattern. Indeed, as has been said before, the first great Oriya dramatist resolved to write plays in Oriya only on account of a revulsion from the performance of Bengali plays on Orissa's soil. But Indian patriotism was no less intense if less copious. The first and foremost national need of the Oriyas of those days was to react manfully to the contempt and exploitation of others as a people. Hence poets and playwrights of that period made it a point to rouse intense feelings in the hearts of the Oriyas for their existence as a united and resurrected people, by recounting their past glories. And so, while Bengali poets and playwrights have gone mostly to the annals of Maharashtra and Rajasthan and to the history of the Mughals for the materials of their historical plays, poets and playwrights in Orissa have turned their eyes to their kings, Kharavela, Kapilendra, Purushottama, Mukunda and Narasimha. The most important figure in this category is Pandit Godavarisa Misra, of the Satyavadi School. He was essentially a poet and has earned literary immortality in Orissa through his enchanting semi-historical ballads. He has written only two plays, *Purushottama Deva* and *Mukunda Deva*. Not connected with any stage in his lifetime, Pandit Misra could not, in the nature of things, make his plays perfectly stage-worthy. But his plays are distinguished for two reasons: first for the excellent poetic quality of the sentiments expressed and of the language employed, and secondly for the strong patriotic feeling both plays breathe. It is mainly for this that these plays, particularly *Purushottama Deva*, were once the rage in the schools and colleges of Orissa. A song from Pandit Misra's *Purushottama Deva* could be the marching song of any victorious army returning from

the battle-field with flying colours. Quoted below are a few lines.

> We have inscribed victory on the forehead of the Motherland
> In words painted with the blood of the enemy
> Who has been routed,—his pride dashed to the ground.
> And incised on his thousand faces are the curses of Death.
> Come ye brothers, dedicate your lives to the service of the Motherland,
> And you will reap the rewards of a hero on the other side of life.
> The Mother, whose history is both lovely and terrible,
> And whose progeny have made her both holy and famous,
> Ye brothers, embellish her with garlands of fresh glory.

Asvinikumara and Kali Charana

The next man to dominate the stage was Asvini Kumara Ghosh. Like the Mahant of Kothpada monastery who patronised Ramashankara Ray's plays, a new patron now comes into the field in the figure of Banamali Pati, a rich countryside money-lender in the district of Puri. This village Shylock was later cruelly murdered by a group of his victims. It may be that he helped start the Art Theatre, which has in a way been the mother of the modern stage in Orissa, as a profitable investment for a fraction of his miserly accumulation. For nearly a quarter of a century this Art Theatre, with its repertoire of Asvini Babu's plays, constituted the entire professional theatrical world in Orissa. After the proprietor's tragic death the party broke up and was entirely eclipsed for some time. Then it revived as the Annapurna Theatre which is now running with comparative prosperity. It has permanent stages both at Cuttack and Puri, each with its own troupe of actors and actresses.

Asvini Kumara Ghosh established the prose drama on the Orissa stage. Closely connected with the Art Theatre, he evinced excellent stage effects in all his plays. He has nearly thirty plays to his credit. But they suffer from too much of a 'stagey' atmosphere and theatrical speech. They are all totally lacking in literary grace.

The man who supplied these correctives to the Oriya plays had no difficulty in quickly driving Ghosh's plays off the Orissa stage. He is Kalicharana Patnaik, a noted musician and an excellent director. He has now nearly thirty plays to his credit. One, *Bhata* (Rice), ran a hundred nights when it was first staged, a record in Orissa. Kali Babu, though retired, is still the centre of the present-day Oriya stage. He ran his own stage for nearly two decades and created out of unpromising raw material all the actors and actresses who are of any importance in Orissa today. It was Kali Babu who made acting a natural art on the Orissa stage—a much more difficult thing than the artificial, formal and stereotyped performances of the old days. He has made dialogue natural too and has used music for excellent stage-effects. As a matter of fact, Kali Babu's plays have become attractive and popular more for their music than for real dramatic art. Swayed by an impulse to cater for the taste of the groundlings, Kali Babu has however debased his plays as literary works by over-loading them with many of the attractions of the *yatras* and *suangas*, including some of their vulgarities. Unfortunately this Kali Babu tradition now reigns supreme on the Oriya stage. It is a mixture of horse-play and rough humour, like the slapstick of the cinema. The operatic qualities of the *yatras* are grafted on to a so-called dramatic form which merely provides a background. Character development and high seriousness, literary dignity, classical taste and idealism are now scorned as unacceptable highbrow stuff.

But the lowbrow must be told plainly that it is not the passing stage popularity but real literary worth that endures, that earns the glory of immortality. Such plays are few and far between in Oriya, as no stage manager will touch them. But quite unconnected with the professional stage, indeed caring little for it, and guided by pure literary motives, some have produced literary and poetic plays which may long outlive the present and past sensations of the moment. Those deserving mention in this class of literary dramas are *Sitavivaha* of Kamapala Misra, *Purushottamaa Deva* and *Mukunda Deva* of Pandit Godavaris Misra, *Priyadassi* of Kalindi Charana Panigrahi, *Muktipathe* of Baikuntha Patnaik and *Pujarini*,

Rajakavi, *Nashtanida*, *Barabati* and *Buddha* of another writer. It seems to be in the fitness of things, and a challenge to the vulgar sensations of the contemporary theatre, that the highest praise given to any single drama by Professor Girija Shankara Ray, the learned historian and critic of the Oriya drama and son of Ramashankara, in his book *Oriya natya kala* already referred to, has been reserved for one of these small poetic plays of one such writer, in preference to any of the temporary sensations, past or present.

The contemporary playwrights who deserve mention are Bhanja Kishor Patnaik, Rama Chandra Misra, Gopala Chhotaray, Manoranjana Dasa, and Kamala Lochana Mahanty. They are all young and very busy in their creativeness at present. Estimates of their contributions to Oriya drama will have to wait until critics can view them in their true perspective and until the dust of passing controversies has died down.

Considering their dismembered existence of over four hundred years, the Oriyas have a repertoire of plays of which they need not be ashamed. The number is already considerable, and practically all types of plays are available in the language--plays written on strictly Sanskrit lines by Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma, Harihara Misra and Raja Chikiti are there; plays written on a regular Elizabethan model are of course there, and also, pure farces, tragedies, comedies, tragi-comedies, social, historical, political and psychological plays, and so on. Recently one-act plays have been making quite a stir.

THE MASS PLAYS

(*Lakshmi Purana Suanga* and Baishnava Pani's modern *Yatras*)

The masses of Orissa have evolved their own intellectual and artistic entertainments which are closely bound up with the soil and whose history is intriguingly and mysteriously uncertain. There is as yet no accepted theory as to their origin and development—they seem self-evolved and self-contained. They consist of pure dances, or dance and music, or dance and recitation, as also a combination of music and

acting. The pure dances are those of the Adivasis—the horse-dances and the lathi-dances of cowherds performed in the month of Chaitra. The Devadasi dances in the temple of Jagannatha are the pristine forms of the genuine Odissi dance, unchanged for centuries. The 'Gotipua' or boy-dances of south and east Orissa are a combination of song and dance, a sort of make-shift substitute for the Devadasi dances of the temple, but which now represent a complex dance-culture and prolonged musical training.

But the masses would soon get tired of gyrations and the whirling of limbs, if these did not tell a connected story. 'Gotipua' dances are popular, not so much for the art of dancing that they exhibit as for the highly spiced romantic love-songs relating to the love of Radha and Krishna which they describe and enact. Story, dance, music and histrionic art are all admirably combined in the *yatra*, which therefore is the most popular form of entertainment in the villages. The *yatra* may be described as the drama of the village street staged under the open sky without a formal theatre. And these *yatras* have been flourishing in Orissa from the earliest period of her history. In the friezes over some of the caves of Khandagiri near Bhuvaneswara many historians decipher the representations of nothing but mass entertainments. The double-storeyed Ranigumpha is supposed to have been a semi-formal theatre in Jain and Buddhist times. Said Dr. Charles Fabri referring to these caves in a Radio talk: "The most fascinating of these is the two-storeyed cave now called Ranigumpha, with some admirable second century relief carving, the meaning of which has not been made out. It is a complicated frieze of figures reclining, fighting, abducting a woman and of other subjects carved very much in the style of the Buddhist stupa of Bharhut. Some of the figure work, though archaic, is simple and is excellently done and must be counted among the best sculptures of early Indian art. In other caves one finds such interesting scenes as a ballet performance by a ballerina in front of the pavilion, accompanied by the music of a number of musicians sitting alongside. Most probably these were attempts by early Oriya artists to depict mass entertainment which we undoubtedly find in the medieval art of Orissa, as one of the most favourite motifs."

These mass-plays in Orissa are generally described by three names according to their subjects—*lilas*, *suangas* and *yatras*. *Lilas*, such as Rama-*lila*, Krishna-*lila*, or Bharata-*lila* speak for themselves. The *suanga*, the earliest variety, is generally associated with some particular god or gooddess. *Yatra* is a general term, covering most secular and mythological subjects, full of rough good humour, and containing plenty of songs and melodramatic incidents like fights, murder, abduction and rescue of pretty women. All the three varieties seem to have flourished since very early times, particularly the first two. It may not be out of place to give here a short account of one *suanga* of the 15th century, because of the modernism of its attitude towards the position of women at home and in society and to the caste system and general social standards. It is called *Lakshmi Purana Suanga*, written by Balarama Dasa (15th-16th century), author of the popular *Ramayana* in Oriya. The theme and spirit of this *suanga* have become an integral part of the national life and national consciousness in Orissa, an indication of the powerful influence this literature can exercise over the mass mind if treated as the great poet Balarama Dasa has treated it. Now for the story of *Lakshmi Purana:*

Each Thursday in the month of Margashirsha is supposed to be the day of Lakshmi-worship for each householder in Orissa. On that day ladies are expected to cleanse and decorate their houses and worship Lakshmi in the shape of newly harvested paddy and the paddy-measures. Now, on the eve of one such day, Lakshmi, the consort of Jagannatha and the busy housewife of His household, the famous Shrine, begged leave of her husband and his elder brother to go the rounds of the city to see how the holy Thursday was being observed by the people. Permission was easily granted and the two brothers Jagannatha and Balabhadra also desired to have an outing that day. The two parties went their separate ways. Lakshmi, in the disguise of an old Brahmin lady with faithful maids in attendance, called at many doors, visiting the ministers, the chief priest and also the local merchant princes. Everywhere she was disgusted with the sight of lazy men and women still snoring in their beds, with houses still unswept and in disorder, oblivious of her

worship. At last she came to the outskirts of the city of Puri and there she was surprised to find Sria, a Chandala woman, up from early hours and ready for the day's holy fast. She had swept her little cottage clean, decorated it with mural drawings, and had painted the doorstep with rice paste. She had drawn the hundred-petalled lotus with the feet of Lakshmi in it. The living goddess in disguise was charmed to see such true piety, such purity of devotion in a Chandala woman and she entered into her cottage, blessed her and lo and behold, the humble cottage turned into a magnificent palace and an appropriate change took place in all other directions also, such as a common householder would desire. Exactly at this moment the two brothers, Jagannatha and Balabhadra, were passing that way. They saw Lakshmi in a Chandala's house. Balarama, the irate purist, became furious and thus addressed his younger brother Jagannatha: "Look here, Kanhai, your wife is very fickle. She is a disgrace to our family. She lacks the dignity of a highborn woman. See with your own eyes, she is now in a Chandala's house. And soon she will return to the temple and enter our kitchen and defile the sanctity of our holy precincts. I certainly cannot tolerate such irreligious conduct. She must not enter the temple again. If you are fond of your wife, you may go and live with her in the Chandala colony." Poor Jagannatha mildly protested that it would be difficult to get another wife like Lakshmi. Nothing could appease the irate, sanctimonious elder brother. They returned to the temple where they thought they could live peacefully without women.

Lakshmi returned in time to the temple and met Jagannatha Himself guarding the main door. When the great lady wanted to enter, she was prevented by her own husband. A very interesting battle of words followed. Lakshmi protested against the orders of the elder brother and asserted that she had not done anything wrong by visiting the home of a Chandala. Jagannatha replied that, apart from that particular offence, she was on the whole an undesirable woman, whose reputation was that she was in the habit of breaking up old homes to build up new ones, and again breaking up those to build others. Such a capricious woman, said Jagannatha, was not to be accepted any longer in His home and so He was going to divorce her forthwith. Lakshmi, the great lady, was equal to the occasion. She behaved 'manfully' and looked squarely at her husband, rebuking

him loudly for obeying his brother and acquiescing in the accusations against his devoted wife. She said that He, Jagannatha, was no better than a cowherd while she was no other than the daughter of the King of Seas. She would not brook being lectured to by a cowherd on the dignity of caste. When Jagannatha told her to take with her all the precious jewellery she had on and return to her ever-howling, salty, asthmatic father, the ocean king, his lady replied that she would rather leave behind all her jewellery for His new and more worthy wife, and that she need not return to her father's place as a helpless, divorced woman but could manage for herself. She went away beyond the limits of the city, and summoned Visvakarma to build her a home. She lived there in all magnificance with her retinue of women attendants. And she engaged Vetalas to bring away stealthily all the food, the entire wherewithal from the temple so that the two brothers would wander like beggars until they realised her importance in their life. She divined that if the two brothers were to live comfortably without her, no man in the world would care for a woman and she was determined to see to it that such a thing never came to pass. The brothers woke up next morning to find that the whole temple was empty. They felt hungry and went to the kitchen, but there was nothing to eat. Impelled by increasing hunger they came out on the streets to beg food in the guise of old Brahmins, but from each door they were driven off as tramps. After many pathetic and frustrating experiences the two unfortunates came to Lakshmi's new home beyond the city limits. There at last they were given bath and food in the way to which they were accustomed in Lakshmi's old home, the Jagannatha temple. They became suspicious and recognition at last led to reconciliation. Lakshmi however agreed to return to the temple on two conditions: that she would now be free to visit anyone's house irrespective of caste, and secondly that her *prasada* would be enjoyed together by people of all castes from Brahmins to Chandalas. This is in fact done even today.

Thus ends the *Lakshmi Purana Suanga* which was written in Oriya in the 15th century by the great poet Balarama Dasa. It has been enjoyed by vast masses of Orissa for these four hundred years. As a matter of fact this *suanga* has created and established the Thursdays of Margashirsha as national

festivals and as part of the national life of the Oriyas. This speaks of the tremendous influence these street-plays, like the *Puranas*, have been exercising on the mass-mind in our country. And, apart from folk entertainment, what a charming little human and sociological document, what a fine imaginative piece of literature this is. It shows the glory of the woman in the home and pulls the barriers of caste to pieces. Here is, I believe, a good proof that some of these folk-plays are much higher artistic creations than many of the formal plays.

These *suangas*, *lilas* and *yatras* have all become gradually modernised. As mentioned earlier, the folk-plays and literary plays have influenced one another in Orissa to a considerable extent. Particularly since Kali Babu came into the arena of the Orissan theatre, the literary plays have absorbed a good many *yatra*-elements to attract customers, to the detriment of pure dramatic standards. Those who had shown him the way in this field long before, were Govinda Surdeo and Mohana Sundara Deva Goswami who, by bringing *rasa lilas* on the formal stage, had created terrific sensation in their times and undoubtedly proved the irresistible attraction which a combination of the *yatra* and the theatre would have for the masses. On the other hand, the *yatras* have assimilated a great deal from the modern theatre and plays in the course of adapting to modern tastes and subjects. Blank-verse and prose dialogue are copiously used in the present-day *yatras* and they are now divided into acts and scenes, which was not the style before. Modern costumes and current styles in acting are also readily absorbed.

Baishnava Pani

Among the persons who have modernised and revolutionised the *yatras* in Orissa, the most celebrated name is that of the late Baishnava Pani who started his career as a boy-dancer on the stage of the Mahanta of Kothpada. There are nearly fifty *yatras* to Pani's credit, some of them going through thirty to ninety editions. The gift he has made to the mass culture of Orissa is of inestimable value and is indeed deathless. One or two excerpts from one of his *yatras* may show not only how he has modernised them but also how intrinsically worthy his creations are as literary pieces.

The story of Kedar-Gouri is the Oriya version of the romance of Laila-Majnu, of Romeo-Juliet, or of Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Baishnava Pani has a *yatra* or *gitinatya* on this youthful and romantic theme. The story is supposed to have taken place in the time of King Lalatendu Kesari of the 8th century. But Pani, a poet, has completely ignored the dead chronology of history by infusing into his playlet an interesting topicality. So, when King Lalatendu comes upon the scene and enquires of his minister about conditions in his State, the latter replies: "Your Majesty, as you have established hospitals and engaged doctors, everybody is enjoying excellent health in your kingdom and is singing your praises. The management of schools and hostels is also flawless and practically a river of education is flowing through the country. The conduct of officers and officials is also blameless."

The King then expresses his desire to visit a local school, which he does and there meets both Kedar and Gouri, the pre-adolescent hero and heroine who were classmates. Thus the play begins in a modern way.

But soon after, in the next scene, the conventional *duta* or messenger comes in singing a song which is a telling satire on present-day elections. Says he:

Look at the great fun in the present world, ye brethren. See how small folks rise by means of votes and how the fools who cast votes fail to distinguish between the straight and the crooked. After the ballot paper is thrown inside the box, the candidates forget all their appeals and their promises, and pretend not to know us. Baishnava says, Ye brethren, do not get yourselves involved in this muddle.

Now, Kedar and Gouri, prevented from meeting each other by their relatives, decide to meet at night in a jungle outside the town of Bhubaneswara. There, as luck would have it, Kedar imagines through a misunderstanding that Gouri had perhaps been devoured by a tiger and kills himself. Soon after Gouri returns and finding her handsome lover already dead, kills herself too. But before killing himself, Kedar burst into a song full of poignant feeling:

Ah, cruel tiger, where are you? Why don't you come and

eat me too? Do not delay. My beloved Gouri is now inside your stomach. Do mix my flesh and bones with hers. We could not be united in life, why do you not unite us in death? Just now she, whose body was like lightning, would have been in loving embrace with this body of mine. But now I am grovelling in the mire of agony. We left our homes and families to meet here, and you took my loving fair bride from me. This indeed breaks my heart.

Thus, in its dénouement this folk-play rises to fine dramatic and artistic heights in the hands of Baishnava Pani, the great folk-poet of Orissa. The excerpts given above will have convinced readers that folk-plays in Orissa today are not only keenly alive to the demands of modern times, squarely facing contemporary problems in the face, praising or criticising and satirising according to their genuine reactions, but also are replete with intrinsic literary merit.

There are two more types of mass entertainment peculiar to Orissa which should also be mentioned. One is *Pala,* quite different from the Pala in Bengal, and the other is *Daskathia.* Both these types of entertainment are above all vulgarity and though highly intellectual and literary, are still suitable for mass consumption. Both, in their own ways, keep the rural masses enchanted and enthralled by their musical recitations of classical Oriya poetry, interpreting them with parallel quotations from different authors in Oriya and Sanskrit with humorous interspersions. Generally *daskathia* (whose only musical accompaniments are two small blocks of wood, hence the name) narrates a single story, which provides plenty of opportunity for literary digressions. The Palawalas generally take up themes like war, love, devotion or separation and display a wealth of classical literature on each point, singly or, more often than not, in competition with another party. Not the scholars, not the Government or aristocrats, not the printing press in Orissa, but it is these wandering Palawalas and Daskathias who have kept alive among the Oriya masses the keenest appetite and enthusiasm for classical Oriya literature.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SATYAVADI SCHOOL

Though the followers of Radhanatha and Madhusudana continued writing down to the twenties of this century, they had ceased to be a literary force by its first decade. A new group had come into the field which was somewhat critical of the contributions of Radhanatha and Madhusudana. This was the Satyavadi School, founded by Pandit Gopabandhu Dasa of hallowed memory.

Exactly a hundred years after the British occupation of Orissa, the Utkal Sammilani, a political body founded in 1903, which had gathered into its fold people of all ranks from the prince to the peasant, made a unanimous demand for unification of the scattered Oriya-speaking tracts under one administration. In the previous year, the journalist-patriot Pandit Nilamani Vidyaratna had sown the seed, as narrated before, in Ganjam and south Orissa. This was the earliest demand to be made in India for a homogeneous state on linguistic basis and for the next thirty years, the unification of Oriya lands was the dearest dream and the sole aspiration of all Oriyas. Poet, patriot and saint, Pandit Gopabandhu Dasa, became the very heart and soul not only of this national agitation, but of the entire national life of the Oriyas during this period.

On the model of the Fergusson College in Poona, Gopabandhu started a Vihara in the extensive *bakul*-garden of Sakhigopala, eleven miles north of Puri. Inspired by his idealism and saintly character, highly educated persons like Pandits Nilakantha Dasa, Godavaris Misra and Kripasindhu Misra, who could have got excellent jobs under the British Government for the asking, joined Gopabandhu on pittances. Theirs was the old Indian ideal of plain living and high thinking. They voluntarily adopted this ideal to set an example to younger generations for the uplift of Orissa and of India.

The institute where these eminent scholars formed the patriotic staff was only a High School, but because of Gopa-

bandhu's personality and the intellectual eminence of his sacrificing band, the Satyavadi High School became and remained the cultural centre of Orissa for about two decades. Gopabandhu and his associates all took up literature, for which each of them had displayed natural aptitude from his student-days, as the means for propagating their ideas and ideals. They wrote histories, poems, plays and innumerable essays in their zeal to awaken in the hearts of their people a patriotic consciousness, the desire to live again as free men and revive the glories of their forbears. The result has been quite an appreciable body of literary work with a distinction all its own. The Satyavadi School broke up too soon, in the flood-waters of the Gandhian movement. The staff stepped into the morass of politics and Gopabandhu died prematurely. But the entire group has become immortal for the work they did in the few years they devoted to literature as teachers of the Satyavadi High School. Though not a very great figure in literature, nor original in any way, Pandit Gopabandhu, the leader of the group, so completely symbolised the national feelings by his saintly life, that he deserves foremost consideration in describing even the literary contributions of the Satyavadi School.

PANDIT GOPABANDHU

The most inspiring orator, the noblest politico-social worker and the most far-sighted and clear-minded educationist so far in Orissa, Pandit Gopabandhu Dasa was essentially a devoted servant of humanity. Though handicapped by an organic defect of speech, the high-souled Pandit, out of sheer will to communicate his vibrant spirit to the masses, became a moving orator, swaying vast crowds to tears and laughter in a way that has never been known in Orissa before or since. Charged with lofty emotions, he more often than not spoke poetry, and some of his addresses in councils and conferences are now taken as classical examples of beautiful, noble Oriya prose.

The patriot really started his public career as a poet. The little that he produced in his student days was so marked with individuality as to attract special recognition from no less

a personality than Radhanatha Ray, the demigod of Oriya literature in those days. But, after passing out of the university, Gopabandhu became so immersed in various nationalistic activities that he completely forgot poetry, his adolescent love. The founding of the Satyavadi School was only one of his multifarious activities. There was no aspect of the national life which did not engage his attention, or which failed to be blessed with some significant touches from his noble personality. In order to spread his ideas among the classes and the masses of Orissa, he first founded the monthly 'Satyavadi' and later the weekly 'Samaj'. In the editorial columns of these two journals Gopabandhu poured out his soul, his feelings and his agonies too. The prose that he wrote with an inimitable blend of the colloquial and the classical, easy flowing, sonorous and rhythmic, reminding the moderns in Orissa of the charm of the biblical idiom of the *Bhagavata* of Jagannatha Dasa—was a revelation of the nobility which Oriya prose can attain at the touch of a master spirit.

Responding to the call of India's struggle for freedom, Gopabandhu did not hesitate for a moment to sacrifice his school and his periodicals, and even to leave the unanimous Oriya agitation for a province of their own, of which he was by now the heart and soul, into the background, in the interests of the larger national emergency. He made himself and his colleagues the spearhead of the freedom movement in Orissa. Gopabandhu was imprisoned in Hazaribag jail for two years from 1922 to 1924. In the lonely leisure of those years Gopabandhu came back to poetry, the old love of his student days.

He wrote two small books inside the Hazaribag jail. One is *Bandira Atmakatha* or the 'Soliloquy of a prisoner'. In this book he tells us his reactions to men, things, places and affairs as the railway train swiftly carried him from Orissa towards Hazaribag in Bihar. Without any attempt to heighten the effect through embellishments of any sort, the simple verse used in this book turns into noble poetry, charged with the galvanising outpourings of a great heart. First published in the columns of the weekly 'Samaj,' even while Gopabandhu was in jail, these soliloquies took Orissa by storm. Lines from them are now part of the intellectual make-up of every

educated Oriya. Here are some examples to show how that patriotic soul cried out in agony for the suffering millions and why these soliloquies touched the heart of the Oriyas so deeply.

How well do I know the people of Jenapur, where
The train that carries me out of Orissa has stopped.
Three years ago I visited this place,

When it was devastated by floods,
Incalculable was the damage done to homes, crops and cattle,
And a thousand eyes were wet with tears.
Ah, those painful scenes, whose very memory
Agonises my whole soul.

The train is already signalled to leave,
The last bell rings, the green flag waves.
How I wish in vain, alas, to get down here
To meet the dear people of Jenapur once more,
And moving from village to village,
To speak a word of hope to everybody, before parting!
How I wish too to pour out my unspoken feelings to them,
Before an assembly of theirs on the sands of the Brahmani,
And to see how the poor dears fare
Under the tyranny of both Man and Nature!

The other book that Gopabandhu wrote in Hazaribag jail is *Dharmapada*, describing the heroic sacrifice of his own life by the boy-architect of that name, in the interests of his class, while engaged in the construction of the temple of Konaraka. The legend was already there, but he has given it literary glory. He has tried to put before the modern Oriyas, as the ideal for the individual citizen, the willing readiness to forget his own interests for those of the state, the community, and the nation, that Dharmapada showed when occasion so demanded.

These two poems have become as popular in Orissa as folk-poetry. Artistically they are not of a very high order, but what moves the ordinary reader so deeply about them

is the nobility of the ideals and the purity of emotions they express. Gopabandhu's poems of his student days are also available now in book form. In some of them the Gopabandhu that we know, the great, noble, humane soul, is clearly visible even in those early years, through the humanistic and universal feelings they carry.

GOPABANDHU'S COLLEAGUES

Pandit Nilakantha Dasa

First among Gopabandhu's associates and now the doyen of litterateurs in Orissa, Pandit Nilakantha Dasa is reputed more for his erudition than as a poet, though his immortality is going to be based on what he produced as a poet during the days he was a school teacher of Satyavadi. In those days he produced excellent translations, or rather adaptations, of Tennyson's *Enoch Arden* and *The Princess* which read almost like original works and are most enjoyable for their style. In *Dasa Nayaka* (*Enoch Arden*) it is colloquial and in *Pranayini* (*The Princess*) loftily grand. His historical-biographical *kavya*, *Kharavela*, adapting classical Oriya metres to modern treatment, was not very popular because of the uniform elevation of its style which was not necessary and which also, one feels, went over the heads of its readers. His *magnum opus*, and fortunately the most popular of his books, is the *kavya*, *Konarake* (At Konaraka) with its two prologues—'The Night at Ramachandi' and 'The Dawn at Ramachandi'.

The young patriotic scholar-poet once led his students, as Head of the Satyavadi School, on an excursion to Konaraka. Unfortunately, there were heavy showers and they all took shelter in the temple of Ramachandi on the sea-shore about three miles away from the Sun-temple. The tired students soon fell asleep, leaving the poet-scholar to his musings over Konaraka, its fall and the fall of the Oriyas also. He imagines that the boys were dreaming of Konaraka in their sleep, after having seen its wonderful architecture and sculpture. Through those dreams the poet unrolls the whole panorama of Orissa's history in the subconscious world of his young students. That is the first prologue, 'The Night at Ramachandi'.

In the morning, the boys see again the rain-washed magnificence of Konaraka, the billowy sea, and the golden undulations of the beach, broken only by the meandering silver line of a river running into the sea. The poet describes these beauties to his students and then leads them on to the royal romance of Narasimha Deva and Maya Devi in which lies the seed of the marvellous creation that is Konaraka. This is the second prologue, 'The Dawn at Ramachandi'. The reader is then ushered into the magic world of the main book, the *kavya Maya Devi.*

In the compound of the Sun-temple at Konaraka there is a temple of Maya Devi. It is still a mystery how a temple bearing the name of the Buddha's mother could find a place at Konaraka. Many have conjectured from the existence of this temple that Konaraka was once a Buddhist shrine. This is still disputed. But the young poet-scholar Nilakantha Dasa tried to provide a most plausible explanation of this mysterious temple, an explanation which he constructed out of popular legends. He relates how, once when he was out on a trip in the ex-states of Orissa, he heard this story from a mendicant minstrel.

Prince Narasimha Deva, son of Anangabhima Deva, in one of his expeditions to fight a notorious highwayman and his infamous band, came to know of the princess Maya Devi of Sisupalagada, whose chieftain-father had been plundered of all his wealth by that gang. The prince immediately fell in love with this beautiful daughter of an impoverished feudal chief. There were frequent secret meetings and it was taken for granted that they would soon be married. But in the meantime the old king Anangabhima Deva had arranged his heir-apparent's marriage with the princess of Kashmir, negotiated by no less an emissary than Visvanatha Mahapatra, the celebrated author of *Sahitya Darpana*, who is supposed to have been a contemporary of Anangabhima. When this news became known to the crown prince he was broken-hearted. He hastened to Sisupalagada and hesitatingly and in tears, broke the bad news to the princess Maya. Surprisingly, the reaction in the lovely princess was altogether different from what was expected. She welcomed the news, asked the prince not to worry about her, and requested him to come after his marriage with the Kashmir

princess to Sisupalagada along with her and take her (Maya) with them to the Barabati fort (where the kings of Orissa formerly lived, now in ruins at Cuttack) as a serving maid to the future king and queen of Orissa.

Narasimha married the Kashmir princess. But soon after, he left Cuttack for Tamralipti to free that imperial port of ancient Utkal, of piracy, leaving word to his young bride that she should call on the princess Maya at Sisupalagada. The Kashmir princess met her husband's first sweetheart and was moved by her charm and character. But mysteriously enough, when they were about to embrace each other, princess Maya collapsed and died in the other's arms. According to the former's wishes, secretly expressed to a confidante, she was not to be cremated but her body was to be embalmed and placed in a box and, after being taken to the Barabati fort, the home of her lord, floated down the river.

Narasimha Deva returned from Tamralipti via the eastern sea-coast and landed at Charitra (Hiuen Tsang's Che-li-ta-lo) which was then a prosperous harbour, standing at the mouth of the river Chandrabhaga. The Kashmir princess was there to welcome him home. People talked about a box floating in the harbour containing the dead body of a lovely lady, whose charms even death had not been able to undo in any manner. Narasimha personally went and brought the box out of water, recognised that it was none other than Maya and over her earthly remains built the temple of Maya Devi, as the first step in the plan for the magnificent Sun-temple of Konaraka. As Narasimha lifted Maya's dead body out of the box he had a mystic experience in which Maya told him who they actually were—the Sun-god had been born as Narasimha himself, and Maya and the Kashmir princess were no other than the two celestial wives of the Sun-god, Chhaya and Sanjna. She was now leaving him to permit her friend, the Kashmir princess, to possess his undivided affection during this particular terrestrial existence.

Pandit Nilakantha Dasa has written a *kavya* of grand, wild beauty, most befitting this noble royal romance against the background of the medieval feudalistic world of Orissa and of India. Interspersed with matchless ballads and songs in the style of Tennyson's *Princess*, this *kavya* has the indelible stamp of a creative individuality. The lines flow on like a

mountain cascade with Browningesque vigour and Miltonic grandeur, and the young poet throws out similes and metaphors of his own and a profusion of ideas, in a style of versification that is at once pliant and manly, expressive as well as recondite, vibrant in simple charm and magnificent in bejewelled aristocracy—all of which together combine to make it a grand work of art, in spite of occasional blemishes caused by careless construction and an apparent obscurantism born of sheer exuberance.

Pandit Nilakantha has been a great figure in modern Oriya prose also. His *Arya jivana*, published likewise in the Satyabadi School days, still remains unique among its kind. It is a collection of essays interpreting the Hindu view of life and society. The style is in the grand manner all through, vigorous and assertive.

The Pandit has continued to write essays on pure literature also. For the last 40 years or so he has been spearheading the opposition to the Radhanatha School, spreading the view that the latter has spoiled the pristine purity of Oriya literature. Panditji is a deep scholar of Sanskrit and of the Chaldean culture. He talks enthusiastically of Assyria and Zarathustra and Ahura Mazda, whenever he gets an opportunity. He has been an implacable enemy of Vaishnavism and openly denounces the Bengali culture, so largely imbued with the Bhakti and Tantric cults, as a disastrous influence on the culture of Orissa since the days of Chaitanya.

Pandit Godavaris Misra

In the early days of Orissan patriotism, the first quarter of this century, Pandit Godavaris Misra's plays, *Purushottama Deva* and *Mukumda Deva,* caused a sensation everywhere in Orissa, as we have already seen in the chapter on the drama in Orissa (Chapter XV). Now they are little read and seldom staged. But his ballads based on historical anecdotes and legends of Orissa are really superb and assure their author immortality as a poet. His other short poems are available in several books. They have a character of their own, but lack both grandeur of ideas and polish of style. They are popular for their homely naturalness. His recently published autobiography is a worthy addition to that class

in Oriya literature.[1] Pandit Misra has left behind a considerable mass of prose writings also in the shape of short stories, essays, and adapted novels. All that Panditji wrote breathes warm patriotism.

Pandit Kripasindhu Misra

Pandit Kripasindhu Misra was the historian in this group. To the great loss of Orissa he died just when he was attaining maturity and had enough experience to produce great books in his chosen line. His big book on Konaraka is really monumental. His other books are *Barabati* and *Utkala Itihasa*. Apart from their value as histories, their enjoyable literary grace easily secures for their author an honourable mention in the history of Oriya literature.

That is all about the Satyavadi group. Flourishing in the heyday of the Utkala Sammilani, with which the group was closely associated, it went on creating literature that reflected the glories of ancient Orissa so as to inspire the Oriyas to participate in the national agitation for a united Orissa. They presented the ancient Vedic culture in a new garb to suit modern times. It is also in the writings of some of this group that one comes across a most eloquent advocacy of universalism and international brotherhood, growing out of a healthy nationalism. The writings of Pandit Gopabandhu in particular breathe the purest humanitarian sentiments, rising above all narrow considerations.

We now come to the twenties of this century when India was swept from end to end by the cyclonic Non-cooperation movement of Gandhiji. Gopabandhu and his group plunged headlong into this national movement. The Satyavadi School, the very heart of Orissan culture and literature for about two decades, which had maintained unbroken the tradition of Orissa's literary history, broke up, leaving all but anarchy in her literary world. Visvanatha Kara, the famous Brahmo editor of the 'Utkala Sahitya', was bitterly opposed to the Non-cooperation movement and openly described it as 'mass hysteria' in the columns of his monthly.

[1] Selected for a posthumous Award (1962) by the Sahitya Akademi

CHAPTER XVII

THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

THE GREENS

WITH the break-up of the Satyavadi School, the cultural life of Orissa in general and Oriya literature in particular, went into an almost anarchical condition for several years. Though it had been the veritable nursery of national culture in Orissa for two decades, the School now came to be considered 'Satanic' because it taught English. Its brilliant staff was scattered all over the country for the propagation of the charkha and to raise money for the Tilak Swarajya Fund, which were parts of the Mahatma's Non-cooperation movement. The Satyavadi School, in spite of reforms and innovations, had carried on the cultural and literary traditions of Orissa that started from Emperor Kharavela's grandiloquent chronicle, in the 1st century B.C. and flowed in a continuous stream of ever widening expanse, revealing ever newer landscapes, down to modern times. The cyclonic blasts of the Gandhian movement, however, broke that tradition, a break that the nation had not known even during four centuries of a dismembered existence.

And the break, apart from the vacuum created by the disappearance of the Satyavadi School, was heightened and intensified by the rise of a group of young writers whose roots were not only nowhere in the Oriya speaking lands, but whose muse derived its inspiration direct from Bengal and the Bengali language, against the influence of which the Satyavadi School as a group and Pandit Nilakantha Dasa in particular had waged an uncompromising battle, in all that they did, said and wrote.

This new group, under the leadership of young Annada Sankara Ray, who was already known all over the state as a brilliant student, consisted of half-a-dozen of his undergraduate friends in the Ravenshaw College, the premier educational institution of Orissa. The group is now generally known as the Sabuja or the 'Green' and the works it produced

are collectively described as Sabuja Sahitya or the Literature of the Greens.

Of this group, three alone come in for consideration in a history of Oriya literature. They are Annada Sankara Ray himself, followed by his friends Shri Kalindi Charana Panigrahi and Shri Baikuntha Natha Patnaik. Of these three again, the reputation of Annada Sankara continues to remain high, out of all proportion to the small amount of writing in Oriya to his credit and in spite of the fact that soon after topping the list of successful candidates at the then Indian Civil Service Examination, he changed to Bengali, in which language also he has earned lasting fame as a novelist and essayist.

When Ray, Panigrahi and Patnaik entered college, Rabindranath Tagore was in the noon-day splendour of his fame. That this grand creative genius cast his irresistible and inevitable spell on these impressionable adolescents cannot *cause any surprise. But that they, as a group, permitted* themselves to be completely swept off their feet, forgetting their own land, people and culture, cannot speak very highly of the virility of their talent.

The group's very name, *Sabuja*, was borrowed from the *Sabujpatra* of Pramatha Chaudhuri, the famous Bengali prose stylist, and friend and associate of Tagore. Sabuja or Green, as used again and again by Tagore himself, in his poetry, was a symbol for rebellious youth. But, with Rabindranath and Pramatha Chaudhury, the word was almost a credo, a philosophy of life. It came to them late in life, in the maturity of their experience and studies, as a sort of shock-tactic to shake off the mental lethargy of their countrymen, enslaved more by their own social and religious customs than by alien rule. The word Sabuja was for them a call to the youth of the country, to revolt against all that was lifeless, senseless, joyless and ugly in our society, to bring a new zest into our intellectual and spiritual life, a new appreciation of the physical beauty of the earth.

The Oriya Sabujites, however, had nothing of this spirit in them. As a matter of fact, they were too young and too immature to have any settled creed at all. They hadn't even begun life. The experiences of life that alone provide the

wherewithal for creative work of any significance were still ahead of them. Soon after, all the members of the group entered the world's arena of struggle and their literary productions changed colour as often as the passing literary and political fashions demanded.

The group started its career in 1920-21, but it failed to produce any book of its own before 1930. In that year a representative anthology of five members of the group made its appearance, after 10 years of almost incessant ephemeral publicity in the pages of the 'Utkala Sahitya'. But even this representative anthology did not contain a line indicating either what the group believed in or what it wanted to destroy. And the book—*Sabuja Kavita*—appears as a whole a mere collection of poems of very uneven quality, having neither any co-ordinating theme nor any particular socio-politico-religious attitude. The book has not been popular either; it has not had a second edition, though 30 years have elapsed.

That the group had absolutely no roots in Orissa's national life or culture, this single book is sufficient proof. The Mahanadi is mentioned once in a casual way. Nature in Orissa in these poems of an entire literary group does not otherwise exist at all. The poets sing only of fairies and clouds and mango blossoms in a vague, general way. Even Kalindi Charana's *Puri Mandira* (Temple of Jagannatha) is so vague that what he says of that great shrine could as well apply to any other holy place in India or even a temple of any other religion. And Kalindi Charana's poems in particular are so full of metrical errors that the lot are reduced to the level of mere juvenilia. In this anthology at least, his poems should have been thoroughly revised before they were allowed to find permanent place in a book.

Annada Sankara

The poems of Annada Sankara however stand out, demanding unstinted praise. They depict the poignant story of a young mind riven with conflict, but giving, all the same, a message for life, with a soft but stable aesthetic statement and remarkable metrical correctness, considering his age at that time. Unlike the poems of Kalindi Charana or Baikuntha Natha or

Harihara or Sarat Chandra, the other contributors to this anthology, Annada Sankara's have a completeness of their own, indicating their birth in his own soul at least, if not in the soil of Orissa. Young Annada Sankara sings of love, beauty and youth in the most full-throated manner, as vigorous adolescence should. But at the same time, the brilliant young man feels the calls of life, of the world outside, of his duties and of his youthful ambitions. He plans to destroy (*The Detroyer*) all that is effete, old and inhibiting, but is restrained in his zeal by his sensitive reaction to love and beauty and to the imaginary self-satisfaction of an ivory-tower existence during a prolonged creative process. At last the young poet decides to plunge into life, and bids adieu to his Muse in a magnificent valedictory poem, *Kamala-bilasira bidaya* (Farewell of the Lotus-lander)—a poem that still remains unique in the whole of Oriya literature, symbolic not only of the general spiritual conflict of adolescent minds, but of Annada Sankara's own unexpected exit from the Oriya language and his adoption of Bengali as the medium of his later creations.

Lines like 'Once departed, youth does not return' or 'When the girl blossomed like a *champaka* bud in spring', taken from those youthful poems of Annada Sankara, are now on the lips of every educated man in Orissa. His poems, though small in number, are aesthetically among the finest treasures of Oriya literature. But what distinguishes them from the products of his Sabuja friends and of many others also in Oriya literature, is the existence in them of the welcome intellectual ferment of youth, those virile uncertainties of a healthy adolescent mind and the compromises and decisions, made in adjustment to conditions of life, which only talented people know how to make with grace. All this intellectual and aesthetic beauty reigns in every line that young Annada Sankara wrote forty years ago, with a history and a message of their own for readers of every generation in Orissa.

Baikuntha Natha

The lines of Baikuntha Natha, not only in this anthology, but in all his numerous other poems of the period, are not only completely free from any serious rhythmic deficiencies, but have a fluency of expression, an apparent spontaneity

of manner and a liquidity of diction that would have been enviable in any poet. In those young days of his, Baikuntha Natha moved readers with a fire and a music in his lines that reminded them of Shelley. But, alas, that warmth and that spontaneity soon vanished, leaving only quantities of doggerel behind. Unfortunately again, his poems are the vaguest in all Sabuja poetry. The poet has failed to establish that mysterious harmony between emotion and intellect which is the hall-mark of great poetry. His poems, particularly of the early period, therefore read well, but do not convey a definite or consistent message. They lack the clarity and cohesion of thought which so distinguishes the poems of young Annada Sankara, his friend.

Later on, both Kalindi Charana and Baikuntha Natha have tried to be intellectual in their poetry. But they have only made their propagandist efforts obtrusive, filling their poems with dull and cheap arguments. Late in life Baikuntha Natha, however, lost a child and wrote a series of sonnets burdened with the heart-breaking sorrow and despair of a poet-father. This sonnet-sequence, forty in number, and collectively called *Mrittika Darsana* (Philosophy of Dust) may be taken as Baikuntha Natha's masterpiece, though the poems would have gained in poignancy and intensity if the sorrowing poet could have restrained his ever-multiplying and ever-crowding thoughts, his despair and despondency. As they are, they make this elegy on the death of a child unique in Oriya literature, sublimating a natural human sorrow to philosophic heights—though the philosophy itself is as cheaply pessimistic and as life-negating as the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible or the *Manabodha chautisa* of Bhaktacharana. It is artistically inferior to both. But we must admire the daring introspection of the poet when in deep but illuminating sorrow, he asks his own partner in life. the mother of the lost child:

> Will you, mother, who now think yourself so badly treated,
> Stand detached from life henceforward for ever?
> Will not you, tomorrow, under the influence of Maya,
> Forget this sorrow?

And will not this wound of Death soon heal?
All is like a passing cloud, Laugh! O laugh!
Vanity of vanities, are love, beauty and ideals!

How naturally also the despairing, bewailing poet hugs the very sorrow that crushes his spirit! It is now his only refuge.

The human child, searching in darkness, down the ages,
Seeks the secrets of life. Proud of his sciences,
How foolishly he has hymned his meagre discoveries,
While the mysterious grows more mysterious,
Refusing to answer the soul-racking query of Man.

Death and Darkness are the end of living beings,
Man has prayed blindly age after age,
Annihilation ends all glory and all struggle
And takes us in loving kindness to its bosom.
Tears, wounds, pain are the only Truths;
In the presence of my loving sorrow
I forget philosophies, all argument, and pretentious light.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SABUJAS

Kalindi Charana

The Sabujas not only produced immense quantities of poetry in their several styles, but wrote novels, stories, and essays also. Emulating a previous attempt in Bengal, they collectively wrote a novel, *Basanti*, which was quite a sensation at the time. Annada Sankara's literary essays on particular Oriya books and authors definitely broke new ground in their time, revealing a wide study of international literature. Also, they were written in a measured prose, in contrast to the ignorant and frothy adulation which is taken for literary criticism by most so-called critics in Orissa, even today. Kalindi Charana, in the group, made a mark also as a writer of short stories. Poet, essayist, novelist and story writer, Kalindi Charana stands out today as the real representative of the group, covering as he does all the facets of the group's activities. Of his novels only one, *Matira Manisa*, has proved successful and popular. This book has been rightly selected by the Sahitya Akademi as one of the ten books in Oriya to be

translated into other Indian languages. The novel has carried forward the tradition of Fakiramohana in being written in a fluent colloquial style, and in not giving an incorrect pen-picture of Orissa's rural society, though the Gandhian idealism which the book preaches in a veiled way is a very rare thing in the countryside of Orissa, as anywhere in the world.

Few of the poems of Kalindi Charana can really claim high stature as, with the metrical errors already mentioned and a sort of laboured felicity, most of them lack warmth of feeling, the white-heat of imagination and the emotional abandon which make great poetry.

Here, for example, are a few stanzas from two of his supposedly representative poems in the latest anthology of modern Oriya poetry. Readers may judge for themselves. This is from *Gold*:

> Lifeless metal, but incomparably beautiful,
> At what dawn in history did your lustre come to be prized?
> What laughter have you brought to the world,
> And what rivers of tears have you made to flow,
> Oh, coveted of the Universe, Oh victorious, Oh great Gold!
>
> You have urged the hands of a son to cut his father's throat
> And sown the seed of distrust in the hearts of pretty women.
> All things are estimated by your value
> And the world shall sing your glory in all ages.

And this is from *The Museum*:

> If we look at the governments, formed throughout History,
> All seem to represent some religion or other,
> But where is the one Religion for all mankind?
> And is not all worship, all meditation,
> Just hypocrisies adopted for food only?
> And how can all peoples have one Religion and one Truth
> When food, climate and vesture are so varied the world over?

As we discard old fashions in garments,
Let us discard the old truths and religions.
Truth and Religion are changing, leaving only names behind,
It is difficult to know what they are,
Their qualities are not visible to the eye.

The Sabuja Poetry

Collectively speaking, it is the poetry produced by the Sabujites in the twenties of this century that alone has given them their distinguishing label in Oriya literature. That there is enough of the 'sabuja' (green) in the poetry the young Sabujites poured out, cannot be gainsaid. Their lyrics were definitely a departure from all that had been produced so far in Oriya literature. True, the whole pattern was borrowed; true also that the roots of the young enthusiasts, like their imaginations, were hanging in an undefined air; true too that the poems were not even technically mature. But it has to be admitted that the Sabuja poetry ushered the intellectuals of Orissa into a new fairy land of beauty, music and freedom glimpsed in Orissa only by flashes in the pages of the ancient Upendra Bhanja or the modern Radhanatha. The Sabujites introduced new patterns of rhyming and new metres that have now been somehow assimilated into the language. Their bold attitudes to love, woman, and life are now part of the accepted mental pattern of the average intellectual in Orissa. It is the Sabujites again who first introduced an international awareness in Oriya literature.

For all these desirable and most excellent qualities we are most thankful to the Sabuja group. Their real achievement does not lie in concrete products so much as in the creation of a new atmosphere, in the discovery of new horizons, and in new ways of saying things.

THE INDIVIDUALISTS

Contemporary to or closely following the Sabujites were also many individual writers who devoted themselves to pure creative work, impelled by intrinsic talent and inner urges, unaffiliated to groups and without labels. In a world

completely vitiated now by coteries, sectarianism, and fanatical battles of labels, these solitary figures stand apart as souls dedicated to Saraswati, regardless of the quality of their total achievement. The outstanding names among them are Shri Godavaris Mahapatra and Shri Radhamohana Gadanayaka. And, though coming into the picture a little later, Shri Krishna Chandra Tripathi also belongs spiritually to this category.

Godavaris Mahapatra

Shri Godavaris Mahapatra is the one literary man in Orissa who has successfully proved that writing can be a vocation by itself. Not equipped with any academic degrees, but endowed with a powerful pen, this ex-student of the Satyavadi School has worked silently in his closet and avoided public appearances as far as possible. He has been, all the same, a force to reckon with in the socio-political life of Orissa during the last thirty years. Poet, short-story writer and novelist, Mahapatra discovered in his late middle age that he has a talent for satire. Ever since, the satirist in him has completely and triumphantly suppressed all other aspects of his creativity and helped to establish him as the richest source of humour in contemporary Orissa. Mahapatra may safely be taken as the most widely read writer in Orissa today. As editor of the 'Niankhunta' (The Poker), his monthly magazine, Mahapatra has set a record perhaps unique in modern Indian languages. As a matter of fact, Mahapatra is not the editor alone of this monthly, but its sole contributor, its printer, publisher and sales manager also. The majority of Mahapatra's writings cannot however claim the status of literary satires, for they are no more than personal lampoons. It is unfortunate that Mahapatra often stoops to the level of personal attacks, thereby only revealing his own prejudices. That way Mahapatra may be said to have set a disastrous example in Orissa. Though extraordinarily effective for the moment, his writing also dates quickly from week to week. His excellent talent is therefore wasted in ephemeral success. A selection of his satires has recently been published in a book, *Kanta o Phula* (Thorns and Flowers), but it is no more than his magazine in book form, not

likely to make any difference in the character of these writings.

But some of Godavaris Mahapatra's short stories are likely to be counted among the best in Oriya literature. His stirring patriotic song, whose first few lines run thus:

> Rise! Oh, rise! Ye dead men of Barabati[1]
> Rend the earth asunder! Ye hundred Captains of Khurda,[2]
> Raise your heads, and listen,
> The Mystic is calling at the old gate of the city,
> Above the inaccessible mountain pass and below the castle walls.
> Nations are awake; breaking your fetters,
> Rise! ye dead men, ye weaklings,
> To regain the glory of the past, glories lost and glories dead—

will ever be echoed by Orissa's sky, with its grand emotion, grandly spoken, in grand rhythm.

Radhamohana Gadanayaka

Shri Radhamohana Gadanayaka occupies a niche of his own in modern Oriya literature as the greatest balladist after Pandit Godavaris Misra, and for his almost immaculate rhymes. He has made fine, inspiring ballads out of many neglected incidents in the history of Orissa and of India—reminding us in a general way of Tagore's *Katha o Kahini*. Recently he has brought out a beautiful collection of ballads on birds and beasts famous in the tradition and literature of India (*Pasupakhira kavya*). He has made his mark also as a translator of poetry, and has very successfully translated Kalidasa's *Meghadutam*. All his original lyrics make delectable reading for their excellent musicality. One, entitled 'The Wayward', seems to represent the erratic life of the poet. The concept of an uncompromising liberty of action con-

[1] The historic fort at Cuttack in ruins ever since the British captured it after 3 days' assault

[2] The last fort in Orissa to be destroyed by the British

tained in this poem moves the reader with its virile individuality. Here are two of its typical stanzas:

I admit, your old familiar paths are straight and easy,
And there are millions of them spread around this earth.
There are no hurdles on them and no occasion for despair,
Life runs on them smoothly, with mechanical ease.

But I shall walk the untrodden paths,
and the untravelled ways
In spite of your scolding,
As I desire to know and discover,
what lies behind the Veil.

For that, I shall silently place upon my head,
glory as well as insult, and
Shall open my breast to storm and tribulation.

A day will come
When you shall seek me out,
To honour me for all that, for all that.

Though no degree-holder, Gadanayaka is surprisingly erudite in Sanskrit, Oriya and Bengali. He is well acquainted also with English. He is now considered the greatest metricist in Oriya literature.

THE PEOPLE'S POETS

In the thirties new trends of thought made their appearance, not because of any extraordinary happenings in Orissa but as distant dying eddies of the intellectual revolt in post-war Europe, reaching the quiet shores of Orissa through books and newspapers, mostly brought in from Calcutta. Marxist theories had already been put into practice in Soviet Russia, creating global enthusiasm for the have-nots and the underdogs. In India, too, under the inspiring leadership of the Mahatma, the entire nation was going through an unprecedented upheaval in the effort to win freedom from alien rule. But the average contemporary Indian intellectual, it seems, felt a greater fascination for the Soviet experiment and

the Marxist political ideologies, than for the message of the still small voice of the great Indian leader. The apotheosis of Gandhi by poets and writers of India was already over by the end of the twenties, leaving in the intelligentsia only a lukewarm sympathy for the national movement. The disillusionment came generally out of the conduct and character of Gandhi's individual provincial followers. The intellectuals were shocked by the ugly clay feet of the golden images of their imagination. But they were yet to know also the actualities of communist rule in Russia whose severely censored press kept all its ugliness from general knowledge, and to which, not only distance and inaccessibility but also clever propaganda lent an imaginary charm. While the horrors of concentration camps, purges, shootings without trial and incredible espionage as an integral part of communist rule were yet to become common knowledge, the glamorous dream of a heaven on earth for the common man continued unbroken.

To the Marxian political Utopia was added the supposed great discovery by Freud of a new psychological empire of the subconscious. And parading of a knowledge of or admiration for these two new trends in international thinking became the mark for the 'progressive' or 'modern' among a large rising group of intellectuals. So, speaking from our experiences in Orissa, many poets and writers who were not even national, became internationalists overnight, just by parroting the communistic or psycho-analytic jargon. The most fantastic claim made by these so-called 'Progressives' was to call themselves the 'People's Poets', despite the fact that their jargon-crowded lines were not intelligible even to highbrow intellectuals. In their estimation, any verse that mentioned Lenin and Stalin automatically became great poetry. All else was trash. The tempo of this literary fanaticism has considerably diminished by now, but unintelligibility still continues to be considered by some as a mark of great poetry, perhaps out of sheer habit.

Bhagbvati Charana Panigrahi

The real pioneer in this field was, however, a quiet, un-

obtrusive, but intrinsically very highly cultured young man, whose words were as clear as crystal and who had no hypocrisy nor any pretensions. He was the late Bhagavati Charana Panigrahi, younger brother of Kalindi Charana Panigrahi. This young man's premature passing away has been an irreparable cultural loss to Orissa. Through stories, essays and other publications, and actual political field-work, he laid the foundation of Leftist thought in Orissa. Of those who joined him and survived him and are still supposed to be holding the banner of Leftist thinking, but with less verve are Sachi Routaray, Ananta Patnaik and Manmohana Misra. The last-named won a reputation as a composer and singer of stirring Leftist songs in early years. He has long left his erstwhile communist comrades, denouncing his old ways of thinking. Comrade Ananta Patnaik still writes, but writes such jargon that it is impossible for us common readers to say what exactly it is all about. A few excellent pieces, however, on matters not related to Marxist ways at all, in correct metre and delectable and intelligible diction, do exist to his credit. One such is a moving poem on Bapuji's death, entitled 'Let the blood flow and flow'.

Sachi Routaray

But the loudest in the whole group, the one who claims to be the pioneer and the sole representative of all that is of progressive thought in Orissa, is Sachi Routaray. Poet, novelist, short-story writer, and essayist, Sachi has, admittedly, been quite a force to reckon with in Oriya literature for the last three decades. It is he who started calling himself and others of his brand, 'People's Poet's There are other claims too. Whatever one may think of them, it cannot be denied that Sachi Routaray has been or once was in possession of a powerful pen. Of the whole band of Leftists and so-called 'Progressives', we find in Routaray's literary craftsmanship alone an undeniable force and individuality. Even commonplace Leftist or surrealist jargon is touched in his poems with a charm and power that is just not there in other writings of the same category. It is a pity therefore that Routaray's

real creative work is so small, bearing no proportion to the claims he has made. The poems he wrote in the early days of his literary career on Orissan village life (*Pallisri*) are among the finest of the class. His short stories reveal an unusual insight into the mind of the rural folk and keen social observation, but there are, alas, not more than a dozen or so of them.

The Common Man in Modern Oriya

Nearly half-a-century before Sachi Routaray and his followers pretended to be 'People's Poets', Fakiramohana in fiction and Nandakishor Bala in poetry had brought the common man of Orissa into the magic circle of literature, in a moving and dignified manner, with deathless lines. They did not shout sectarian slogans about the 'class-war' or 'the sovereignty of the proletariat', nor had they felt any necessity to address the common reader with strings of unintelligible gibberish, all the while pretending that they spoke the language of the people as well as for them. We get much more moving pictures of the sufferings of the common man in the have-not layer of our society, painted in lines beautifully transparent and surprisingly artistic, in the poems of Krishna Chandra Tripathi, than in those of Sachi Routaray. There is not one poem of Routaray's to compare with Tripathi's 'Musa, the scavenger' or 'Neta, daughter of Damia of Padhan street'. They convey indescribable suffering, suffering not necessarily due to economic factors alone, of the unknown human individual in any part of the world. How copiously does Routaray, eager for the Progressive claptrap, shed neat big tears for the masons of Konaraka, in which marvel of human dream he sees nothing but tragedies of slave labour. That is not at all a fact. And this is how the People's Poet essays to speak to the hearts of his people:

Geometry

On both sides of canals
Are parallel lines of palm trees.
Are these blue blue maps in paddy fields
Drawn by the soft hands of the triangular cloud?

In the triangle of the forest the banner of clouds flies
(On the green, gray and soft crests of the forest).
Today the carpet of green grass is spread on earth,
And we shall meet.
Is the river Krishna in spate?
Is the Gangetic valley rain-drenched?
Oh friend, while plying my boat on the Tista and the Meghna
Suddenly I turned south.
Do you know how the oblique line
Of the diamond fish turned its angle?
The fountain from the eye of the golden fish
Suddenly struck the boat on his way!....

What could be finer 'people's poetry' than this? Yet it is Routaray again who complains that the poems of most other modern poets in Orissa are above his head!

The Chauvinistic and Black-marketing Moderns

By the end of the Second World War, the scene had changed. The hammer and sickle harangues had exhausted themselves. All unknown to himself, the poor rickshawalla had become, for some time, the most glamorous hero of short stories and poems, and had as suddenly gone back into oblivion. There is absolutely no sign of hammer and sickle now anywhere in either poetry or fiction. The field is now crowded with pseudo little Ezra Pounds and pseudo little Eliots.

All or most of these moderns or progressives in Orissa, as far as we know, have been shown up again and again as mere imitators, if not plagiarists. If the Sabujas borrowed ideas and phrases, the so-called Moderns are known to have lifted from other languages whole poems intact, passing them off as their own. They steal, are exposed, are ridiculed and steal again. How else can such ill-equipped bands of poetasters satisfy their hunger for poetic fame? Many of them do not know even their own country and people or even their own language. They seem incapable of producing anything on their own. The scribbling of distorted prose in the illusion of producing poetry is all they are capable of. They seem to be completely unaware of the various stages in the evolution

of modern trends in the Western literatures. There is nothing of Futurism, Imagism, Symbolism, or Surrealism in anything that they write. They have only taken the vague externals of modern versification from English or Bengali, mostly from Bengali, and use names celebrated in those languages in defence of their own incompetent products. An honest critic in Orissa has to think several times before he pronounces judgement on any literary piece that takes his fancy lest, lying in the pages of some obscure magazine or book in Bengali or English, the original of it be detected.

On the whole, the achievement of the Moderns amounts to very little. The noise they make is out of all proportion to their intrinsic worth. That is just because they behave like political parties and when confronted with questions they cannot answer, they react with table-thumping, shouting, and threats. These appear to be acceptable parts of their literary interpretation.

At the head of such armed defenders of the faith stands Shri Jatindranatha Mohanti, a Lecturer in English. This intellectual has been propagating the view that nothing so far has been produced in Oriya literature as wonderful as the poems of his two protégés, Shri Guru Prasada Mohanti and Shri Vanuji Rao. In a pontifical introduction to an anthology of these two poets' representative poems entitled *Nutana kavita* (Modern Poetry), Lecturer Mohanti says, *inter alia*:

There is as much difference between these poems and those written by others in Orissa today, as there is between Eliot's unification of sensibility and dissolution of sensibility. One may be called the *poetry of 'give-up'*, the other *of 'co-ordination'*. Such a co-ordinating spirit is the greatest fact about these modern poems. The newness of these poems consists not only in the poetic urge, in style or discipline of expression, but in the new attitude to life embedded in the poems themselves, which is absolutely new in Oriya poetry.

How unrelated these claims are to actual performance, the readers may like to judge for themselves. There are

half-a-dozen poems in this anthology from Shri Mohanti's first favourite, Shri Guru Prasada Mohanti. These deal not only with adolescent love but with adulterous love and are without the least vestige of the sublimating experience of the grandest human emotion that love is. They reek merely with gross physicality. Here are a few samples:

These days I walk on the river sands, in the grey
evenings,
Where I see people in red and blue and other colours,
In lonely corners. Sighs intensify as night presses on,
And many breasts are unified.
The more dunes rise, the greater burns fleshy desires;
You, darling, should come to me, there
To drip grossness and obscenity,
From your lips, as much as you can.
Come to me either as chastity or as much like adultery
as possible.
My lips will be torn by your teeth,
Thick and lonely sands will churn beneath your
breasts,
Your hot blood will cool with satiety
And my soul will vanish in your body.
(from 'Dear Sweetheart')

Evening steals from the lane like a fugitive,
I sit by the window, crouched, treasuring in my
pockets,
Not jasmine garlands and bouquets of champaka-buds
But her blouse, her round breasts and her black eyes,
In my handkerchief they are tied, in my body, my soul
and my maleness.

I shall question, 'May I ask you something today,
darling?
Do you know the hottest part of hell is the penalty for
unchastity?
Do you know the end of this adultery?'
(from 'The Worthless')

I have seen you slowly take off your shoes,
And stretch yourself upon the bed, with your hair and
garments dishevelled,

And then rise again to recondition yourself,—
Then we meet in the Town Hall meeting.

You love and grow quick with child,
I have seen the cinema posters on your body,
When the wind sweeps you off the ground
I dream of you in the paradise of my pyjama coat.
(from 'Alaka Sanyal')

Need we go further? The readers must have observed by now, the 'unification of sensibility', the 'co-ordinating spirit' and the 'new attitudes to life' these revolutionary poems convey and for which Jatindranatha Mohanti claims such uniqueness. They were indeed never seen in Oriya literature before, as he says. In the opinion of Mohanti, by 'new attitude to life' is meant perhaps a new attitude to sex, and starkly physical at that.

Not content with an Introduction of this kind, Jatindranatha Mohanti brought out a magazine named 'Prajna' (Wisdom), to publicise the unique poetry of his literary heroes. The first page of the third number of this quarterly is adorned by a poem entitled 'The Breasts' from the pen of Mohanti's other great favourite, Shri Vanuji Rao. It has given up all semblance of verse, though in the table of contents of the issue it is still listed as 'poetry'. It is plain prose. Anyway, here are a few paragraphs (not stanzas) from this most modern of modern poetry:

When the sea of my desire is storm-tossed and black waves are about to engulf my universe, my boat loses all sense of direction, and I feel lost in the midst of hostile forces. Then I mistake your breasts to be buoys, where my boat may cast its anchor.

Sometimes the breasts appear dead and cold as twin mausoleums built of hard marble. Or they are twin planets of the starry heavens—the sun and the moon.

On long winter nights your breasts are two warm, swollen loaves, right from the oven. By the time the stars in the sky disappear, I lie in my bed and think it is all illusion—your breasts are only the lid of the casket of my mind.

One searches in vain in these nerveless echoes of other people's words for the slightest glow and warmth of strong individual feeling, or the crusaders' spiritual fire, or the revolutionary's righteous anger. Sachi Routaray's hammer and sickle variety of poetry and that of his erstwhile comrades had at least a fire which warmed many hearts. But these ersatz Pounds and Eliots have neither the dream of the brave new world of the Leftists nor the sense of prophetic frustration as revealed in 'The Waste land', nor yet the amazing scholarship that lies behind Pound's cantos.

The Exotics

The second band of the Moderns, while not quite so egocentric as the ones described above, has pinned all its faith in the exotic, in the distant and the unfamiliar. Orissa, her history, her people, her culture, and all she stands for does not interest them. They seem to feel that to appear progressive or modern, one has just to ignore the traditional and indigenous subjects and styles. Their leader is Binod Chandra Nayaka who, writing in his village home, in a distant border district of Orissa, sings of the long arctic night, the Aurora Borealis, the dance of the pigmies in equatorial Africa, or the smile of Zanzibar girls picking clove-flowers, completely oblivious of his native environment. Here is a sample drawn from another of these exotics, indicating the depths of delusion of such geographical modernism. It is part of a letter supposed to be written by an Oriya girl to her scholarly lover in England. Even in India, this supposed Oriya girl does not inhabit in her native Orissa, but writes from Kalimpong, the Himalayan hill station.

KALIMPONG

Dearest Darling,
I hear you have turned Marxist,
And sent your Keatses and Byrons
From your shelves to the second-hand bookshops,
Worshipfully putting in their places
Tolstoi, Turgenev, Gorki and Engels.
You have joined also, I hear,
Some Roadside Committee at Hyde Park Corner !

You write to say that you will visit the Slav countries
And China, after finishing your Continental tour.
What is all this, my darling?
To what have you come!
Why not go to Rome or Turin or Gibraltar
Or, say, Venice, under whose grey sky
Shelley wrote poetry inspired by Tuscany wine?
And that Switzerland where the whole world throngs
To see its snow and multi-coloured clouds.

I would like, darling, for you to go there also.
And when you go, forget not to take with you, darling,
The Prussian pullover and fur coat,
Our marriage gifts.

And, you say you will go to the land of Stalin!
No, no, I cannot permit you.
If you insist, Potassium Cyanide will be my resort;
I shudder at the idea!
Remember, you are a D. Litt. of Oxford,
An A.M. of the University of Columbia,
And you must know, my father has made a will in
your favour,—
Yours is his ship-building concern.

(*The Exchange*—by Basavadatta Misra)

Such a letter has never been written in Oriya, because there is not one among the seventeen million Oriyas, rich enough to will away a ship-building concern to a wayward Marxist son-in-law, nor does such a highly cultured, cosmopolitan and financially free son-in-law exist in Orissa. This is nothing but the fancy of a deluded band, which imagines that exotic references alone are enough to make a poem look grandly progressive and modern.

THE CREATIVE BAND

Fortunately, however, such deluded, chauvinistic or eccentric people are not all the writers in contemporary Oriya literature. The 'Moderns' loom in importance so out of proportion to their actual achievement because of their group-consciousness, bellicose behaviour, propagandist conduct and

also the very angularities they deliberately adopt in their pretensions to originality.

But there are scores of other poets and writers who silently go on contributing their quotas, enriching and expanding Oriya literature. By the very nature of the creative process each of them has to be individualistic. Each has to speak in his own way, responding to the call of his inner urge or the summons of his environment. They cannot, like the Leftists or the Moderns, have common labels to shelter under, nor form groups to fight battles of slogans.

Among such dedicated young writers, *Shri Krishna Chandra Tripathi* comes first to mind. Humble, unostentatious, uncontaminated by any 'ism' except humanism, unspoiled by any pretensions, and far above plagiarism, this poor schoolmaster who lives in a distant village has not yet received the recognition he so much deserves. Lines like his, which throb with human passion for the underdog in society, are found nowhere in the work of the so-called Peoples' Poets and nowhere is it so artistically expressed. Genuine poet that he is, Tripathi, while overcome with his own sorrow, speaks poignantly also of the sorrows of his village, of his neighbours, of his country and lastly of humanity. In his hands, 'Musa Hadi', the scavenger, and 'Neta, the daughter of Damia of the Padhan Street' stand out as symbols of pervasive human suffering everywhere. Absorbed in the men and nature around him, this poet gives us the most unforgettable miniatures of rural Orissa. His poetry alone, of all the writings in contemporary Oriya, presents to us a real picture of rural Orissa with all its frustrations, in the midst of a beautiful landscape. Like his passionate outpourings on the sufferings of man, Tripathi's patriotic ballads (*Ahuti*—Offering) are warm and touching, and the poems in his *Sankha* (Conch-shell) are fiery with revolutionary ardour. Tripathi, of all the contemporary poets and writers in Orissa, stands out as the most dedicated soul, completely given to creative labour. He cares little for publicity and cherishes no loyalty to anything except his own creative urge, speaking of the truth with genuine poetic passion and music.

Shri Kunja Behari Dasa has already produced a considerable

amount of poetry and is still producing. But unfortunately most of it is no more than readable verse. Though there is plenty of socialistic or patriotic enthusiasm, the genuine poetic fire is not much in evidence in most of what he produces. Of late, Kunja Behari Dasa has appeared as a collector of Oriya folk-poetry, publishing considerable volumes. But the Orissa Press has condemned much of it as a deliberate fake. While Dasa has made quite a noise about it, not without material gain, the real pioneer and most genuine worker in this field goes unhonoured, though not unrecognised. This lone worker from one of the dark interior ex-states of Orissa, *Shri Chakradhara Mahapatra*, has been silently collecting and compiling folk-poetry from all parts of Orissa for the last thirty years. It has been the mission of his life. Recently his monumental anthology has come out with a beautiful poetic Introduction. This is going to be one of the finest collections of folk-poetry in Indian letters.

A few words of tribute should be paid here to the poetic talent of the late *Prana Krishna Samala* in whose tragic and premature death Oriya literature has lost a writer of fine sensibility. Prana Krishna adorned whatever he lay his fingers on. His earliest poems reveal a vision of beauty similar to those found in the writings of young Keats. It is most unfortunate that just when his powers were reaching maturity, he became the victim of a mental disturbance, which proved fatal. He died in 1958 at the age of 46.

Srimati Vidyutprabha Devi, among the women writers in modern Oriya, has written a considerable amount of very readable poetry. Her felicity of expression is remarkable; her lines run in an easy, spontaneous flow, soft, harmonious, elegantly phrased. However, this is the only feminine touch to be found in this lady writer's works. She seldom writes on peculiarly feminine problems. Under a man's name her poems would not show any incongruity at all. On the whole, therefore, Vidyutprabha's poetry appears to be no more than super-excellent verse.

It is, on the other hand, in the rather unpolished lines of young *Manorama Mahapatra* that we find a genuine, unsophisticated, womanly touch. But she is just starting her

poetic career. For her age *Kumari Tulasi Dasa* writes more like a scholar and thinker than as a person of strong emotions that an adolescent is expected to be.

Sick, poor, shabbily treated by life, *Rabi Singha*, the fiery young poet, stands in Oriya letters today, as a typical intellectual Bohemian. Young Rabi Singha shows the fire of an uncompromising rebel in all that he writes. But this is merely the voice of an Angry Young Man. Lasting contributions from his pen are yet to come.

Among a host of young writers who, without faith in any slogans, have adopted the modern verse-forms in order to speak out their minds because these forms are handy for their purpose, mention should be made of Shri Jnanendra Varma, Shri Chintamani Behera, Shri Ramakanta Ratha, Shri Binod Routaray, Shri Durgamadhava Misra, Shri Durga Charan Parida, Shri Brajanatha Ratha, Shri Manoja Dasa, and Shri Jadunath Dasa Mahapatra. In the writings of Shri Durgamadhava Misra, Shri Ramakanta Ratha, Shri Binod Routaray, Shri Chintamani Behera and Shri Jnanendra Varma, the individual feel, the germ of all creative products, comes out quite clearly, despite the modern verse-form. Shri Durgamadhava Misra's quiet little poems on the writer's day-to-day domestic and personal problems, Binod Routaray's and Chintamani Behera's on Love, Ramakanta Ratha's on his intellectual reactions to social circumstances, and Jnanendra's satires, all prove beyond doubt that the modern verse-form has its own uses and that it is more suitable for certain ways of expression than any other form. The lyric, the epic, the song, the ballad and the sonnet were all invented in different ages to meet ever-new demands of expression. So it is, that modern verse answers certain creative needs. There is no denying the fact. But the trouble with some of the bellicose moderns is that they make a fetish of a mere form, and try to pass off deliberate eccentricity as a mark of genius. The world cannot be taken in so easily.

Of these moderns in Orissa, however, two in particular deserve special mention. They are *Shri Ramakanta Ratha* (I.A.S.) and *Shri Jnanendra Varma*. The poems of Shri Ratha arrest the common reader's attention by a keenness of observation and by an intellectual quality that is not

usual with the common run of this class of writers. Clarity of vision and a genuine co-ordinating spirit, present in each of his pieces, set them apart from the others. They prove also that form by itself has little to do with genuine poetic creation.

Shri Jnanendra Varma, among the younger contemporary poets, reveals the true modern and progressive mind. An out-and-out free-thinker and iconoclast, he shows scant respect either for religion, mysticism, social conventions, or political sham. Conscious of a poet's mission, he never hesitates to hit out at hypocrisies with sharp satire wherever he finds them. Unfortunately, he has not mastered the rhythm in his lines and some otherwise excellent poems are marred by juxtapositional incongruity. The thinker in him gets the better of the artist in his iconoclastic enthusiasm.

The Cavalcade of Ages

But the wonder of wonders in Oriya literature is the fact that here the most ancient is seen walking abreast of the ultra-modern. Besides the internationalists stand the intensely parochial. Books written in the style of Upendra Bhanja or Sarala Dasa are being produced even today, side by side with those that claim to be most modern in style and content. A Pandit at Berhampur (Ganjam district) is composing a *Gandhi Mahapurana* on the lines of Sarala's *Mahabharata*. And the Kalinga Bharati Association, founded by the late Bichhanda Charana Patnaik, is as much chauvinistic in its efforts to establish the patterns of medieval Oriya poetry as the standard verse-form in Oriya, as are some of the moderns in claiming exclusive excellence for their own works.

The interesting intellectual battle is in progress. It is not likely to end in the foreseeable future.

PROSE: FICTION

The Satyavadi School, the centre of reform and crusade that it was, and manned by brilliant intellectuals, made a very creditable contribution to the development of Oriya prose. We have already spoken of the inimitable elegance of Pandit Gopabandhu's orations, addresses and editorials,

and of the virile prose of Pandit Nilakantha Dasa. The Sabujites contributed an international touch and an easy expressiveness which had not been there before. Sachi Routaray's prose writings have no distinction of their own, but his single novel *Chitragriva* is the only example in Oriya of a continuous satire. Strangely enough, there has so far been no effective dissertation in Oriya giving a convincing academic interpretation of the Leftist attitude to life, in spite of so much Leftist noise. This easily proves that Leftist literary movements in Orissa have been more political than intellectual and are the backwash of the mental ferment taking place elsewhere.

Gopinatha Mohanty

Basanti and *Matira Manisa* are the best novels to the credit of the Sabuja group. The language of urban *Basanti*, and even of *Matira Manisa* set in a rural area, has an unmistakable middle-class sophistication about it. Spiritually, the Sabujites could never acclimatise their thought processes to the earthy soil. Their works as a whole breathe only middle-class elegance. In bold contrast to the Sabujite elegance emerged, next in order, the rough, rugged and vital prose style of Gopinatha Mohanti, redolent of the furrowed land, the wild forests, the craggy hills and fast-flowing hill streams. Here was a style stamped with the impress of a unique individuality, with its own ways of looking at things, and with the courage to say things in its own way. It is a style that is Gopinatha Mohanti's own, and can never be anybody else's.

Gopinatha Mohanti is in every way a path-breaker. Caring little for the problems of publication and sale, he has written enormous novels, and with even less concern for their popularity, he has taken as his subjects, not the popular romantic or the socio-political topics of the educated middle class, but the fate and traditions of the primitive aborigines in the distant jungle district of Koraput. Of the thousands of employees of the State Government of Orissa, he alone seems to have completely identified himself with the people, and has been able to see rich human values which have failed to interest hundreds of other officers. Mohanti has not only turned the lives of the aborgines into modern

prose-poems, but has also studied their languages and written their first grammars. Here is indeed a worthy officer of the Indian Republic. He has put to excellent use his opportunity to know his country and people. He himself has rightly said in a self-revealing article, *Why I Write*:[1]

I love the visible as well as the invisible world. I love Man, I love Life. And this love flows out into expression, as water from a down-turned pitcher. . . In this process, the sorrows of other people become my own, and the joys of the external world enter into my inner existence. Whenever I sit down to write, my thoughts silently entertwine with this country where every particle of dust shows love for me, where Nature includes my personality, and the same blood as mine runs in the veins of Man, no matter how far off he lives. This relationship brings intensity of union and the pleasure it gives is not to be found elsewhere. In the darkness of my environment I keep this lamp of love alight and creations come of this union. I do not know, of course, what value the critical world may give to these works!

It was in the fitness of things that Mohanti received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his book *Amritara Santana* (Children of Immortality) describing the life and habits of the Kondhas of Koraput district. But that may not be Mohanti's masterpiece. *Paraja*, treating the same Adivasi life, is a much better constructed novel. And Adivasi life, too, is not the only field to which the novelist has given his attention. His *Harijan* is a far more realistic and powerful novel than Mulkraj Anand's *The Untouchable* dealing with the same subject. His *Danapani* (Bread and Water) gives us a most pathetic and true picture of a lower middle class householder, who kills his conscience and yields to all compromises in the interests of his family.

It is a pity, however, that, aesthetically considered, Mohanti's total achievement may not be found commensurate with his interest, his enthusiasm and his labour. He may be a path-breaking pioneer, but the true creative artist need not necessarily be a path-breaker. Mohanti's works have the

[1] 'Dagara', Vol. XIV, No. 4

appearance of the wilderness. They seldom make happy reading. Mohanti has never trained himself to stop where he should, but goes on and on, till he tires even the most patient reader. His short stories give the impression of essays and his essays take the colour of short stories. His novels, after the initial glamour is over, are likely to date as they do not deal so much with the eternal problems of life, as with specific situations, which are likely to change. He also, at times, uses crudities and vulgarities of expression to prove his devotion to realism but which, if avoided, would not have made much difference to the story.

Others

Gopinatha's elder brother *Kanhu Charana Mohanti* is a far more prolific writer than his talented younger brother. He has regularly produced a novel a year for the last forty years or so. They have an excellent market also, unlike those of his younger brother. But on the whole, Kanhu Charana has not been able to rise to a high artistic level. He should have tried to glory more in the quality rather than in the quantity of books he produces. Of late he is giving a socialistic tinge to his works and some of his novels have been popular on the stage also in dramatised versions. That Kanhu Charana, in spite of being a busy Government official like his brother, has devotedly pursued literature for decades together, is an unusual example and calls for emulation and admiration in every walk of life. Kanhu Charana is one of the few financially successful writers in Orissa. He too, like his brother, has received a Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel *Ka* (She). His *Sasti* (Punishment) bids fair to remain his masterpiece. It is the pathetic story of the love of a country girl for a social outcaste. The heroine Sabi is delineated in natural colours and behaves with remarkable dignity in difficult situations without seeming something apart from her rural surroundings. This book should be translated into other languages.

Others who have been working and enriching the language in the sphere of fiction are Nityananda Mahapatra, Godavaris Mahapatra, Raja Kishora Patnaik and his sister Basanta Kumari. Shri Gokulananda Mahapatra, a college teacher of

science, has produced a few very popular works of scientific fiction. Raja Kishora Patnaik, an advocate, and his sister Basanta Kumari, an M.A. in Economics, deserve a sincere word of tribute from all lovers of Orissa and Oriya literature, for the way this highly cultured brother and sister have jointly devoted themselves to the service of their mother-tongue. Together they have produced scores of short stories and novels and have gone on publishing them at their own expense. Proud individualists, the writings of both brother and sister display their own peculiar styles and their own observation of life. Basanta Kumari's stories and novels are told, moreover, with the right feminine touch, with an eye for petty details and a quiet, natural manner. Her novel *Amada Bata* (Untrodden Path) has been very popular also as a play.

Dr. Harekrishna Mahatab, the well-known Indian political leader, is also a writer in Oriya. To kill time in Ahmadnagar jail he started on historical studies and thus felt a necessity to write the latest history of Orissa. Though adequately documented, it has little literary merit and is not to be compared with the late Pandit Kripasindhu Misra's monumental historical work on Konaraka or even his defective history of Orissa. Mahatab has, however, written three novels, taking the Non-cooperation movement as the motive power behind their plots. These have indeed the unique credit of being the only ones in Oriya in which the Gandhian movement has been so utilised and they present a realistic enough picture of rural Balasore, the district of his birth and also the birthplace of Fakirmohana Senapati. Mahatab's works however lose much of their value because of a style that is plain, without either intensity or nuance.

In the short story the names of Surendranath Mahanti, Raja Kishora Ray, Mahapatra Nilmani Sahu, Bama Charana Mitra, Achyutananda Pati and Pranabandhu Kara are well known. Mahapatra Nilmani Sahu, Ramachandra Misra (Faturananda) and Shri Sunila Misra are very well known as satirists. But, for suggestiveness, breadth of vision, subtle satire, and a high order of intellectualism, Surendra Mahanti is unrivalled. In some of his stories Shri Mahanti tears to shreds the literary and political pretenders of Orissa with biting sarcasm. In others he has delved into some of the

unanswered questions of life. It is unfortunate that, more and more busy in politics, Mahanti's writings grow fewer and fewer. The same may be said also of Shri Sraddhakara Supakara who, coming from Sambalpur, produced some charming stories with fascinating local Sambalpur colour in his early years. But politics, a jealous mistress, seems to have completely absorbed him.

Prose in modern Oriya is fast developing its expressive power through daily papers and journals, which are rapidly multiplying. There was only one daily paper in Cuttack twenty-five years ago. Now half-a-dozen have appeared. Magazines too are increasing in number. Travelogues have appeared in growing numbers. Names well-known in this field are those of Dr. Sriramachandra Dasa, Dr. Radhanatha Ratha, Shri Ananta Prasada Panda, Shri Golaka Bihari Dhala, Shri Sriharsha Misra and Shri Umesha Chandra Panigrahi. Orissa is the only State in eastern India, barring Calcutta, where three professional theatres flourish, giving regular shows throughout the year, week in and week out. One-act plays are extensively produced. One by Shri Pranabandhu Kara was considered the best in India one year. The compilation of adults' and children's Encyclopaedias are also already under way.

PROSE : CRITICAL STUDIES AND BELLES-LETTRES

Critical literary studies are also on the increase. Shri Natavara Samantaray and Shri Bansidhara Mahanti have thrown new light on the development of different periods of Oriya literature. Shri Natavara Samantaray's studies and researches provide an excellent and solid foundation for the historical interpretation of modern Oriya literature from the middle of the last century down to recent times. Young intellectuals like Shri Chintamani Behara, Shri Nilmani Sahu, Shri Benudhara Raut, Shri Narendra Kumara Misra, Shri Sarvesvara Dasa, Shri Pathani Pattanaik and a few others are contributing to true aesthetic and interpretative criticism. In a field clamorous with battles of slogans and bellicose propaganda, the essays of young Chittaranjana

Dasa also are introducing a new element of imaginative intellectuality. In spite of his advancing years, Prof. Artavallabha Mahanty displays amazing energy in editing the ancient classics of Oriya, his favourite occupation. At present he is busy preparing an authenticated edition of Sarala's great *Mahabharata*. But unfortunately Shri Mahanty's involved style of writing, with no eye for precision, renders his ponderous introductions very difficult to digest.

Pandit Binayaka Misra

In contrast to Shri Artavallabha Mahanty and others like him and dwarfing them all by his remarkable achievements, stands the humble but erudite scholar, Pandit Binayaka Misra, worthy of a nation's sincere tribute. With only a middle school education to his credit, this brilliant Pandit has made himself a formidable scholar in several languages, including English. It is he who has added through his researches a new chapter to the history of Orissa, that of the glorious Bhaumas. He has written a *History of Oriya Language* and a *History of Oriya Literature*—both the only authoritative books in the field so far. It is fortunate that the old revered scholar is now busy revising his monumental works, and it is a pity that his valuable contributions, as well as the excellent example he has set before his countrymen of a disinterested pursuit of knowledge, which is so very rare, have failed so far to create the necessary awareness of his importance in the cultural life of his people.

Popularisation of Sciences

Dr. Basanta Kumara Behura, Dr. Gokulananda Mahapatra, Dr. Gadadhara Misra, Dr. Bidyadhara Padhi and many more of the lecturers of Science are doing excellent pioneering work in the popularisation of the sciences in Oriya. In economics and the political and social sciences, Dr. Sadashiva Misra, Dr. Sriramachandra Dasa and Dr. Baidyanatha Misra have been very effectively educating the minds of the reading public with very well-written essays and books. The illuminating historical articles of Dr. Krishnachandra Panigrahi, Shri Satyanarayana Rajaguru and of Shri Kedaranatha Mahapatra make pleasant and refreshing

reading. It is a pity that their writings are so few and far between.

Krishna Prasada Basu

But the palm for the finest Oriya prose in the contemporary scene should undoubtedly go to Shri Krishna Prasada Basu for his series *Akhada ghare Baithaka* (Talks in the Village Music Hall) published in the pages of the monthly 'Jhankara'. Describing in story-form the genesis and character of Oriya *yatras*, they reveal a fluency, a mastery of colloquial as well as scholarly idioms, a pervasive humour, and an unusual narrative power that are indeed amazing in a man who had never attempted any prose before, and who, even now, has no literary ambitions or pretensions. A professional master of music and Oriya *yatras*, Krishna Prasada wanted only to write his experiences. When published in book form, Basu's *Akhada ghare Baithaka* will no doubt be a prose classic in modern Oriya.

Higher Criticism

The weakest branch in Oriya prose at present appears to be higher literary criticism. Plenty of discussion takes place in periodicals, but it is not of a very high order. It is a pity that not a few of the Oriya teachers, of all people, have rather unwittingly become a positive menace to the growth of a virile and intelligent appreciation of the delicate values of literature. Lacking any deep acquaintance not only with international languages, but even with Sanskrit, these pseudo-scholars, their minds habituated to the narrow limits of a single regional literature, take literary criticism to be merely long strings of quotations, and unbalanced, verbose encomiums or pontifical opinions based upon wrong assessments. Typical of this short-sighted and dogmatic tendency in Orissa is the organisation Kalinga Bharati already spoken of, which has been trying to drive home to all and sundry that nothing comparable to the medieval rhetorical poetry of Orissa exists in world literature. The annual meetings of this institution are held in great pomp and are presided over by Ministers, Professors, Pandits and fanatics, all pronouncing absurdities which pander to feelings of cheap regional patriotism.

But this certainly is not the way a healthy growth of literature can be promoted. Will not the Oriyas remember what their own great poet Dinakrishna Dasa once said in his charming *Rasakallola* (last canto), with reference to the importance and responsibility of critics of literature, so many centuries ago? Says he:

Poetry is a delicate woman whose father is the poet,
But whose nurse is the expositor,
Her worth is only partly recognised
If she is enjoyed by a noble soul versed in Rasas.
A perverse ignoramus is no less than a hostile
step-brother to her.

A variety of treasures are there
In the treasure-house of poetry,
To usurp which by force
Only fools, untouched by knowledge, are
generally tempted.
The pretensions of these shameless creatures are
exposed, however,
In their very dealings.

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age 22 line 14 from bottom	*For* unmistaken	*Read* unmistakable	
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„ 55 „ 19	*For* is quite	*Read* is both	
„ 60 „ 18	„ way. He	*Read* way, he	
„ 89 „ 12	*Delete* they		
„ 89 „ 20	*For* the Vaishnavic	*Read* its Vaishnavic	
„ 101 „ 21	*Delete* or		
„ 139 „ 12	*For* tallen	*Read* fallen	
„ 172 „ 7	„ betal	„ betel	
„ 187 „ 5	„ make	„ sake	
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